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orm No. A-368, Rev. 8/95

A STORY OF THE SEVENTIES

By

Payne Erskine

"Lift up your heads, O ye gates, . . .
and the King of glory shall come in."

"All I could never be,
All, men ignored in me,
This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.
. . . . . .
Fool! All that is, at all,
Lasts ever, past recall;
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure;
What entered into thee,
That was, is, and shall be:
Time's wheel runs back or stops: Potter and clay endure."

ROBERT BROWNING

Boston

1901

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UNIVERSITY PRESS · JOHN WILSON
AND SON · CAMBRIDGE, U. S. A.

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WHEN THE GATES LIFT UP THEIR HEADS

A STORY OF THE SEVENTIES

CHAPTER I

CHIARO-OSCURO

"JOSEPHUS, dat yo' clut'rin' roun' dar? Wha' yo' s'poses I hyah dis mawnin'? Yo' t'ink 'case I don' git roun' spry, like I use tu, no mo', I don' hyah nuffin'. Dem folkses f'om de No'f 's gwine fix up de ol' place an' take bo'dahs." The speaker replaced a cob pipe between her lips and laughed a low, soft chuckle. "Take bo'dahs f'om de No'f in de ol' place! My, ef ol' missus' ghos' won't r'ar roun' de place 'nd make dem screach in deir baids!"

The heavy step, lumbering over the loose board floor of Mammy Clarissa's lean-to addition to her one-room cabin, ceased a moment. Presently Josephus' huge figure darkened the small doorway. He must stoop if he would enter. Leaning against the door-post, he regarded the old woman, complacently smoking by the chimney-side, with a curious gleam of humor lighting his broad black face.

"Wha' fo' ol' missus' ghos' r'ar roun' de place 'fo' she daid?"

"Ef she daid, sonny, ef she daid. She ain' hate nuffin' like she hate dem No'f Yankees. She nebber gwine leab dem lib in de ol' place 'daout she pester 'em. Whar missus hate, she pester. She ain' gwine leab go her teef no mo' 'n a bulldog, foh all she so slim an' limber, like de win' gwine blow her 'way. I knows ol' missus, I does. I knowed ol' missus eber sence we war gals 'nd uset tu play togedder. She hate yallah gal, wus 'n she hate niggers 'nd po' white trash. I knows her." With another soft laugh she puffed away at her pipe in meditative silence.

"Whar yo' git so much hyahin' o' de news, mammy?" Lovers of gossip are the negroes all.

"Chas," was the laconic reply.

"Chas!" thundered the man, with sudden anger. "Chas! Did n' I tol' Chas nebber come dis-yer way 'g'in 'daout he want one good squarin' up wid me? Did n' I tol' Chas ef he come walkin' daoun dis road wid he's gen'l'man clo's, an' greased ha'r, 'n' sassy maouf, I gwine roll him daoun de branch like he a gum log struck wid de lightnin'? Which-a-way Chas go?"

The old woman puffed on in silence.

"Which-a-way Chas go?" he shouted, striding in.

Slowly, with the aid of her stick, she rose to her feet, and lifted one hand in warning. "Haish, Josephus! 'Case I ol' an' crupple up, yo' t'ink I gwine sit heah an' hyah yo' hollah at me like dat-a-way! I ain' hol' yo' bof in my ahms an' take de kyah an' patronage ob yo' an' nuss yo' fo' no sich wrastlin's 'n' fightin's an' goin's on like yu'ns been goin' on dese days. Ef yo' wan's Gabr'ella, take

yo'se'f yandah in de co'n patch, whar yo' b'long. She ain' no fool. She know whar de silvah dollah weigh de heavies', on de back, o' in de pocket. Yo' git de dollah in de pocket, 'n' see whar Gabr'ella du de pickin'."

"I ain' kyah'n 'bouts sich trash." Josephus lowered his voice. "Mammy Clissy, yo' allus favohs Chas 'case he cahy yo' white face, 'n' slim, fine figgah, like he a bohned white man. He ain' no mo' white man 'n I is. Heah yo' is ol' an' crupple, wid de rheumatiz in de bones. Wha' he duin' fo' s'pote yo'? Stannin' raoun' de stoah, smokin' de gen'l'man' segyah, wahin' de gen'l'man clo'es, dat buy yo' light-'ud fo' bile de kittle? Huh! Ef he come heah wid he sassy mouf, I gwine knock dat fool smile aout'n him like I knocks de grunt aout'n de slick po'kah time de hog-killin'." With this angry threat he stooped to pass through the low doorway.

"Josephus Ma'shall, yo' look me squah in de eye." He paused at her solemn tone. "Min' now, yo' knows yo' ain' got no grudges 'gin Chas ontwell yo' bof git's sot on Gabr'ella Gunn wha' plays de melogimum daoun tu de cullud folkses' meet'n-haous like dey does in de white folkses' church. Humph! No use in ouh folks puttin' on dese heah fine ahs 'n' ways like dey whitah 'n white folkses. W'en I war gal I min' haou dey uset tu git 'ligion daoun tu de cullud quatahs. Dey git daoun on dey knees an' cry aout an' call on de Sperit, an' rock dey se'fs back an' fo'th wid de powah, an' Brudder Thomas Ma'shall line off de hymn, an' dey niggahs dey jes' rise up an' jine in de cho'us wid de 'Glory

Hallelulia Ahmen' ontwell dey nigh lif' de ruff off de cabin, clar up tu Heaben, an' de Sperit come daoun like de lightnin' f'om de stohm claoud. Sho' nuff, yo' don' hyah nuffin' like dat dese days, wid her a-grin'in' aout de chune on dat ar machine, an' de niggahs gaupin' raoun' at de fine clo's jes' fo' all de worl' like white folkses."

"Huh! Wha' all dat du wid me 'n' Chas?"

"Yo' t'ink I favahs Chas? Look a-heah. Ef yo' a min' yo' kin win' Chas raoun' an switch off he's haid like he been a willah twig in de spring. Wid he's fool ways he ain' got no show long side Josephus no-ways. Yo' leab Chas 'lone, hyah, an' leab Gabr'ella du de pickin'. I 'low she hab eyes, 'n' mo' sense 'n bof yu'ns put togedder. He ain' in yo' way no mo' dan I is. Jes' yo' own lazy way an' mannah, clutt'rin' raoun' de haous co'n-plant'n' time mo' in yo' way wid sich a right smaht peart gal like Gabr'ella."

"G'long 'bouts Gabr'ella," returned Josephus, doggedly. "I ain' gwine 'low dat high-tone Lawd Chastahfield Mahshall smile dat gran' smile tu me like he haff tu step daoun off 'n de white folkses' meet'n-haous ruff ebery time he 'low he's se'f tu say haoudy."

"Nuvva yo' min', honey, yo' don' git no highah up in dis worl' knockin' nuddah man daoun. Yo' jes' ca'y yo' haid up like dat ah rock top o' yandah maountain. Hit a mighty brack rock, heap bracker 'n yo' is, but I 'low Chas' smile kyan touch hit, an' dar hit stan' f'om de beginnin's ob de yearth. W'en yo' feels like yo' gwine git daoun an' t'rash Chas, jes' yo' look yandah an' t'ink w'at yo' ol' mammy

tells yo'. W'en dat rock gwine kill sump'n hit baoun' tu leab de maount'n top, an' roll daoun in de branch, an' hit ain' gwine git back no mo'."

There remained no more to be said. Josephus drew a huge silver watch from his pocket, and, scowlingly consulting it, said, "I 'low ef I git ol' Jude shod dis ebenin' I betteh scuttle roun'."

Knocking the ashes from her pipe and placing it on a shelf suspended near the chimney, Mammy Clarissa proceeded to rake open the embers of the morning's fire.

"Fotch heah leetle mo' light-'ud, sonny. I 's gwine knock togeddah a co'n pone. Sho' nuff, yo' gwine hab dinnah 'fo' yo' goes. Yo' ol' mammy gits mighty lonesome w'en dey ain' nobody heah tu smack dey lips ovah her cookin'."

Stepping about with considerable alertness, with the aid of her cane, there was a cheerful sound in its thump, thump, to the ears of Josephus; she soon had a crackling fire and a boiling kettle, while the odor of toasting bacon pervaded the room. She chattered cheerfully as she worked, while her son sat in the doorway whittling and watching her.

"I reckon yo' steps raoun' heap peartah dan half de gals ef yo' is crupple," he remarked, as she set a plate of smoking corn-bread on a little table under the one unglazed window, and poured out a generous cup of black coffee.

"I reckon," she said, a quick gleam of pride flashing from her eyes. Seventy years of toil and submission had not quenched their fire.

"Mammy, whar was yo' rose? Yo' tells a heap 'bouts ol' mars'r 'n' de ol' place, but yo' nuvva

goes back on dat ar ontwell yo' 'lowed yo' an' ol' missus uset tu play tugeddah. Wan' ol' missus fotch up heah f'om New O'leans o' daoun dat-a-way?"

"Laws! Play wid ol' missus! I speck nobody evah knowed ol' missus like I." She took a cup of coffee and sat down opposite her son. "Yo' nuvah hyeard me tell 'bout'n my maw. She war ol' missus' mammy. We war 'baout 'n age, li'l' Miss Is'bel 'n' me. On'y she war mo' darker 'n me fo' all she war white bohned." Mammy Clarissa leaned forward with her elbows on her knees, and her cup of coffee held in both hands, while she gazed far away into the past. "Her paw war Spanish. He come f'om Cuba o' Mexico, o' New O'leans, some o' dem islands daoun dat-a-way. I don' rightly reckon whar. W'en we war long 'baout 'n eight y'ar ol', he took he's fambly an' my maw long back whar he come f'om. My maw war mighty peart an' putty, an' nigh whitah 'n I is, wid a cl'ar, pale sof' skin, wha' look like de moon w'en hit come up yandah ovah de maount'n in de daytime. Many 's de time she uset tu look at me wid dem great eyes o' hern, so still an sad like I uset tu kiver my haid wid de baid clo'es so 't she could n' look no mo'. I min' haow she took on w'en mars'r lef' me behine. 'Oh, my li'l' gal, my li'l' gal.' I kin hyah dem words yit like hit war yes'day, an' I kin see her yit, leanin' ovah dat ar side railin' long side de boat wha' she sail off in. Dem de las' words I evah hyah her say, an' dat de las' I evah see o' her, jes' her white, white face wid de dark ha'r crumple raoun' hit,—her ha'r wan' like yo' rale

niggah ha'r no way, — wid her fine red silk turban, an' her white dress blowin' aout wid de win', so sof' an' fine (mars'r al'us war mighty proud man, he kep' her jes' so find dressed an' peart) wid de tears runnin' daoun an' droppin' in de watah, an' 'Oh, my li'l' gal, my li'l' gal!' ovah an' ovah. I nuvah fogit hit, nuvah, an' li'l' Miss Is'bel stannin' by pullin' on her dress dis-a-way an' dat-a-way, an' callin', 'Mammy, mammy, leab go dat railin', come heah an' see de boats.' She war al'us mighty marsterful war Miss Is'bel, mighty marsterful, young an' ol'. I spec' ef she libbin' she marsterful still. Dey don' break nowhar aout, dem kin'." She paused and sipped her coffee.

"T'ank de Lawd, dem days is pas' an' gone by," ejaculated Josephus, fervently.

"Yas, yu kin du dat. Yo' tink yo' mighty ha'd used w'en yo' kyan vote yo' own papah, but, laws, dat ain' nuffin' like de ol' times 'fo' de wah. Yo' nuvah rightly had no 'speunce like we ol'-uns. We-uns war jes' kep' undah, an' bought an' sol' f'om one nuddah. I kin feel de ol' feeling rose up in my t'roat w'en I t'ink on dose times, an' hit a mighty big lump tu swallah. Yo'-uns wha' war chillun hab a mighty heap tu t'ank de Lawd fo'."

"De day comin' w'en I's gwine stan' up an' vote free as any white man. Nex' time dey has a votin' I ain' gwine stan' an' see de cullud people knocked raoun'. Ef any man pestah me, I's gib him sump'n dat tek him cl'ar aout 'n dis worl' intu de nex' an' I's gwine raoust up de res' o' de cullud people tu du de same. Dey's one cullud man tu ev'y white man in dis-yer No'th C'liny, I reckon."

"Naw, honey, yo' ain' du dat. Yo' lib de hones', squar' life, an' leab de Lawd du de knockin'. He did n' set yo' free fo' no sech bloodsheddin' an' bad duin's. Yo' mighty marsterful dese days. 'Pears like yo' been cotchin' Chas' high-headed way an' mannah."

"I ain' cotch nuffin' f'om Chas, but yo' min', de day comin' w'en I 's gwine vote fa'r an' no man tu hendah."

"Me'by so, but hit won' be none o' yo' bringin'. Ef hit come, de Lawd gwine fotch hit. He done a heap mo' fo' we-uns dan yo' rightly reckons, yo' ain' had de 'speunce like we ol' ones. He may du a heap mo', but yo' kyan fo'ce de Lawd, hit baoun' tu come in his own time an' way, onless yo'-uns gits tu fo'cin' an' sheddin' bro'dah's blood. I 'low we-all don' t'ink on dat like we 'd aughtah, dat all we f'om de whites' tu de brackes' stain wid' dat white stain. Dar kyan no sich stain be wash aout wid bro'dah's blood. Hit a ha'd sayin', but hit de troof. Yandah sits Joe, brackah dan a burnt pine knot, but daoun undah de brack, in de h'a't ob him lies dat white stain, an' heah sits he's ol' muddah, de white stain all ovah her, but way daoun, in de core like, lies de black streak, like de red in de h'a't o' de wine apple. Hit dar f'om de far way pas', 'fo' I war bohned, an' 'fo' my maw war bohned. Yo' kyan wipe hit aout no mo' 'n yo' kin wipe dat shadow off 'n de wall yandah."

Josephus rose, and, placing his two great hands on the top of the door casing, leaned his head against them and looked moodily out. His mother began to clear away their few dishes. The thump

of her cane seemed to have lost its cheerful sound. A patient weariness settled over her face like a cloud, and she worked in silence.

Suddenly the sun, bursting through clouds, streamed in at the little window, glorifying the cabin. She stood full in its light, deftly moving her slender hands. The quivering water in the pan cast dancing reflections over the rough ceiling and walls. Her silvery hair, waving and crinkling from her forehead, reflected the light, making a halo of glory round her head. She made a fine study in chiaro-oscuro, standing thus in the warm glow, the blackened wall and smoky old fireplace for a background, the strong outlines of her face and figure in the rich radiance of yellow light, which shaded suddenly away into the surrounding blackness of darkness, — a Rembrandt portrait typifying her life; the shadowy background of the past darkened by slavery and its attendant evils, her wrinkled face still bearing its stoical expression of patience, her mind still blighted with ignorance, yet standing now in the sunlight of freedom, the clouds swept away by an unseen hand, and her spirit feeling the warm glow and expanding to a realization of the true meaning of aspiration and trust, of adoration and peace, ignorant, yet having that wisdom which is learned not from books, nor from the tongues of men, but from the soul's temptations and afflictions.

"No, sonny, yo' ain' had de 'speunce like we. Dem days nuvah gwine come back no mo', t'ank de Lawd! Yo' don' rightly reckon what-all he done fo' yo'."

She began putting away the dishes, using one hand while she held the cane with the other. "I kin see dat time yit, de bitterness and de heavy h'a't, de nights o' cryin', an' de days servin' twell missus 'low ef I keep on dat-a-way she gwine sell me off South C'liny way, 'case I spile my eyes fo' de fine stitchin'. Dem days mars'r in Wash'nton, an' she run de place. Hit a good time tu fo'git, mighty good time tu fo'git, but 'pears lak I kyan fo'git no mo' 'n I kin walk 'daout dis-yer cane. Yo'-uns wha' war raised sence de wah, count yo' marcies, an' t'ink a heap on dem ar 'fo' yo' gits tu dis'beyin' de comman's o' de Lawd wha' set yo' free. Ol' Brudder Thomas Ma'shall used tu tell de niggahs daoun tu de quatahs, 'Ef a man hit yo' on one cheek, tu'n de oddah, an' nuvah lif' yo' han'.' 'Pears like hit gitt'n' late ef yo' gwine git Jude shod dis ebenin'. Time 'fo' de wah, I nebber 'lowed tu lib dis-yer way, in my own cabin, wid no missus tu say fotch heah, no' go dar, wid my own son tu plant de co'n, an' dribe he's own mule team long de road."

Josephus grew radiant for a moment with kindly light. "Yo' kin t'ank de Lawd, an' yo' own se'f tu, I reckon. Ol' missus ain' he'p none wha' yo' wo'k an' strive fo' all yo' life, no' de white folkses heahbouts neidah. Yo' git dis cabin an' lan' wo'kin' wid de right han' an' de lef' heah an' yandah, I 's gwine tek right smaht keer o' hit tu." He entered a rough shed a few paces away as he spoke.

"Dat de trues' wo'd yo' done spoke dis mawnin'," she called from the cabin doorway. "Yo' min' de co'n patch, an' leab 'sputin' wid Chas an' de white

folkses. Yo' 's a heap bettah off dan de run o' niggahs, I reckon."

She carefully drew the coals in the fireplace together, covering them with ashes, and proceeded to fill her pipe from a leather pouch hanging by a cord from a nail in the wall near the chimney, within easy reach from her chair.

"Yas, I reckon," she soliloquized. "Did n' I wash fo' Miss Mann f'om de No'f wha' larnt de chillun daoun tu de schule-haouse, de hul' time she war heah, an' she larn' him de read'n' an' writin' an' figu'in' tu pay fo' hit? Ol' Missus 'lowed niggahs could n' l'arn dem ar. Dem No'f Yankees done larn sech as her heap sence dem days."

Again her thoughts wandered to the past. With hands clasped, and eyes fixed vacantly on the hearth, she leaned forward, musing and smoking in silence. Long since Josephus had clattered away on old Jude's back, riding without saddle or bridle, guiding the animals by a stroke of the strap by which Bonaparte was led, or rather ignominiously dragged, for he scuffled along reluctantly after Jude, carrying his nose high in the air at the pull of Josephus' powerful arm.

It was two miles in a straight line from his cabin to the village, but he had to traverse four, up hill and down, before he reached the blacksmith shop, which, with two rival notion stores, — in one of which was the post-office, — a lodging-house with saloon attachment, and diminutive railway station, occupied the main street. Also the place was provided with three churches, a schoolhouse, and a huge pile of lumber, which it was fondly hoped would sometime

be so disposed and arranged as to form a hotel for refugees from a more rigorous clime. Having been put there when the road was first put through, it had lain undisturbed ever since, owing to a quarrel between the owners of the land, which lay back of the town, and comprised the whole of Blue Hill, so named from the color of the pines by which it had been covered; now it bore a bare and stumpy appearance, broken by low scraggy black oaks, which had miraculously sprung into existence after the pines were cleared off.

Josephus kept his mules to their fastest gait, a nimble scamper, swinging the strap above his head, and giving an occasional admonitory whoop, but he neither whistled nor sang, as was his wont. Being a leading voice in the colored choir, he took evident pleasure in his own rich mellow tones, but to-day he was silent. His mother's words were with him. Halfway to the village a stream of clear water cut across the road and wound musically along beside it, among stones and boulders, taking its reckless downward course, now hidden by clumps of laurel and rhododendron, thick vines and jutting, mossy rocks, now laughing in open spots and flashing back the sunlight, now resting in some deep, shaded, inaccessible pool, where the fish lie in hiding. The road, winding up, up, round the steep hillside, ever widened the distance between itself and the stream below, until, looking down from his far height on the jolly little torrent, the traveller sees its flash and glitter, but hears not its brawling, as an aged man, looking back from the summit of his years, sees only the bright-

ness of his youth, but hears not the turmoil of his early life.

The stream was not bridged where it crossed the road; of what use, where people preferred driving through the sparkling water, on its hard, pebbly bed? In the fabled days "befo' de wah," a bridge had spanned it; an abutment of one remained, on which rested one end of a hewn log which had been felled and allowed to fall across for the benefit of foot travellers, the other end resting on and partly attached to its own stump. As Josephus neared this spot, a young negress, trim and straight as a sapling, was crossing, bearing on her head a good-sized basket covered with a white cloth. Instantly, on perceiving her, his whole face expanded.

"Howdy, Miss Gunn, howdy!" he exclaimed, vaulting from old Jude's back onto the log with a spring like a tiger's. "Hit's a right smaht time sence we seed one 'nudder."

"I declar', Mistah Ma'shall, yo' mighty sudden. Yo' put' nigh upsot me 'n' dese heah aigs an' buttah in de branch." Putting one hand up to steady the basket, she slowly turned on the narrow footway, facing him a moment with a half-defiant look, and then moved on.

"Ain' yo' nuvah gwine make up wid me no mo'"? he asked, jerking at the mule's leading strap.

"Naw," she returned, skilfully balancing the basket; "I don' du no makin' up tu yo', no mo' 'n I 'lowed tu roust up dis-yer fuss. Yo' own se'f done dat."

"Heah, Gabr'ella, gi' me dat basket to ca'y tu de stoah fo' yo'. I 's hu'ted 'baouts yo 'n' Chas sweet-hea'tin'. I ain' gwine say no mo'."

"As yo' like, Mistah Ma'shall, I nuvah axed yo' fo' tu say nuffin', noh is I gwine say yo' sha'n't, no'h is I gwine tu de stoah." She seated herself on the stump and rested the basket at her feet. "I 's take a contrac' fo' tu supply fo' de new bo'din'-haouse."

Leaving the mules to drink, Josephus crossed and sat by her side, slapping the palm of one hand with the end of the strap, while he eyed her furtively.

"Listen heah, Josephus," she resumed, "s'pos'n' Chas come daoun de road and see we a-sittin' heah side one 'nuddah dis-yer way, an' den go talk like he t'ink I come long heah dis mawnin','case I t'ink I gwine see yo' heah. Humph! p'r'aps hit my fault yo' come clat'n' daoun de hill. P'r'aps hit my fault Jude got dat white streak daoun her nose. Ef yo' bides 'way f'om meetin', an' Bruddeh Jef'son say Mistah Chastahfield Ma'shall pleas'n lead in de singin', haow dat my fault?"

"Ef Chas stan' long side Gabr'ella Gunn, he mighty neah-sighted all o' a suddent, kyan see dem ar hymn tune words rightly 'daout he look mighty clost, a bowin' daoun tu see, an' a-rosein' up tu hollah, an' a-bowin' daoun an' a-rosein' up 'g'in, rubbin' dat fine greased ha'r ovah Miss Gunn's bes' bunnit. I heah tell hit done look like hit laid in de fryin'-pan on dat side long nex' whar Chas stan'." His great frame shook with inward laughter, as, with head dropped sideways and broad shoulders lifted, he continued to watch her face.

"Is yo' any call tu wah de bunnit? Ef yo' keeps way f'om dat side Miss Gunn yo' own se'f, hit won' pestah yo' none." With face perfectly unmoved by his raillery, she slowly fanned herself with her sunbonnet. The spot was sheltered by the hills from the wind, and they sat, as negroes love to do, in the full glare of the sun. Presently voices broke the silence, and two people approached the opposite side of the stream, walking slowly down the hill.

"I must do it, grandfather." The tones were decided, and the girlish voice was clear and sweet. "She is better here, so we can't take her back. I am sure I can manage, and if you are too lonely and homesick, could n't you spend part of the year with Aunt Anna?"

"Impossible! I would n't think of leaving you alone with your mother in this wilderness. Over half the population are negroes, and the rest seem to be afflicted with some kind of lethargy. You might both die here, and no one be the wiser. No, I must stay by you, but I own to being disappointed in the place."

The man was past sixty, though he appeared much younger. His face was fine and keen, and his figure tall and thin; his great-coat, of the finest material, hung on him with the air of having been long worn, and well kept. Its folds followed the lines of his slender figure, and draped it with the easy familiarity of old friendship.

"I know you are, and it troubles me. I don't care for myself. At any rate, if mamma gets well here, the place will be paradise to me. We are n't

half settled yet; when my piano comes, you will take up your violin again, and we will have some of the good old times together once more." She stopped abruptly as she saw her grandfather hesitate. "Oh, we can cross on that log. I did it yesterday. It is quite firm, see?" She stepped lightly up and held out her hand.

But he stood still, and shook his head. "I am growing old, Portia, I am growing old," he said sadly.

Josephus rose and stretched himself. "Hol' dis-yer strop, Gabr'ella; I 's gwine holp de ol' gen'l'-man ovah." She took the leading strap, and he sauntered toward the hesitating couple.

"Dis-yer log is mighty ticklesome crossin', sah," said he, with a gleaming smile. "Ef yo' tek a hol' o' my han', I 's hol' yo' stiddy like."

"Yes, grandfather, do," said the girl. "It will be too much for you to go back the way we came." After a glance at the negro and another at the brawling water below, he gave his thin, nervous hand into Josephus' strong grasp, and was soon on the other side. "Thank you, my good fellow; it is a fine thing to be strong," he said.

"And I thank you too," said the girl, looking brightly up. She nodded to Gabr'ella as they passed on.

"I do believe that 's the one who is to bring our eggs and butter," she said after a moment. "That 's the way with every one about here, to judge by their actions. They have all the time there is and a little more. One of our greatest trials will be to get anything done unless we do it ourselves."

"Yourself, not ourselves. I am only a draft upon your nervous energy. Hav' n't you, for all your wise little head and busy little hands, think of it, dear, undertaken too great a burden? You have not gone so far but that you can still give it up."

"I have thought of it in all its hideousness."

"The Percys will spend the first season, — that is all very well, very pleasant; but you might get in a disagreeable set, and then there is the chance that, after all is done, the house furnished, the horses purchased, and help engaged, we might get no boarders."

"We won't get the horses until we see if they come, — the boarders, I mean. As for the disagreeable set, I don't take them for companionship, but because we must have money. I will do my part as well as I can, and if people are unpleasant, will try not to mind. There is no other way in this place of earning a living; and as for the place, well, if it were not for the inhabitants, I should think myself in paradise. Now that romantic spot where we crossed on the log, no wonder they wanted to sit there; only they are so used to the wildness, I suppose they have no idea of its beauty. Everything is so clean here, — all nature, I mean. In mamma's room in the evening, I lean out of the window and listen, and every sound seems like a musical note. But, oh, noisy, dirty Chicago! I can't forget that awful night when we thought you dead, and had such a time getting mamma out of the burning district. It comes back to me like a nightmare. When I think of it I don't care for the

home or anything, since I have you and mamma safe." She paused in her hurried words, and her grandfather switched at the azalea bushes with his cane.

"At the conservatory I had my piano and papa's portrait, so we have them still."

"Yes, Portia, we have you to thank for all we have left; but I am an old dog, and 'It's hard to teach an old dog new tricks.'"

"You are not an old dog, you are a dear young grandfather," she contradicted. "You know you did n't care for society; how often you only went with me because I wished it! Here you won't have to do that. No dress affairs to bore you, no operas, more 's the pity, no musicals but our private rehearsals, yours and mine, and then here 's the garden. You always said you would rather dig in the ground than ride in a carriage, and here you have it, — plenty of ground and no carriage."

The anxious look faded from his face, and he put out his arm and drew her towards him. In silence they walked on like a pair of lovers. The path led them away from the road to the village through a wild ravine, past a mill-pond, an old mill, and a rickety bridge. Nature had overrun and adorned what the hand of man had constructed for purposes of utility only, and the place was a perfect wilderness of beauty. They paused on the bridge, leaning over the railing, to listen to the falling water, the steady burring of the mill, and the wind in the treetops. The drops flashed from the great paddles of the clumsy wheel like diamonds.

"Perhaps that is the wheel of fortune grinding

out my destiny along with the negro's corn," said Portia.

A very black negro was mounting a thin white horse to ride away. They had watched him carry in his grist, brought in two ends of a sack hung over the back of the horse. Her grandfather shook his head sadly. "It makes me dizzy to watch it; let us walk on," he said.

"Grandpapa Ridgeway, we have gone too far; why did you let me?" she cried in sudden contrition.

"No, child, I am not tired, but I wish I could look into your future and know what it is to be."

"Are n't you willing to trust that to my Maker?" she asked gayly, though with a quick glance in his face. She darted away to gather a cluster of delicate little iris that grew under a boulder. "Oh, you sweet things! How lovely! I must find more for mamma," and she did, kicking among the dead leaves and sticks. The road led them through woodland with much undergrowth, interspersed with huge rocks jutting out of the ground, half-burnt logs, and great fallen trees, and winding gradually upward emerged on an open level space, fenced in, and showing signs of former cultivation. It was an old tobacco plantation. The road here was hard and smooth, and a worn footpath ran along one side, bordered by wild flowers, and brambly shrubs which caught at Portia's dress as she passed. On the left a rail fence stretched its long line of triangles, its corners filled with a wild tangle of blackberry bushes and laurels and azaleas, while dogwoods and redbuds and other flower-

ing trees lifted their graceful heads above the tangle, and swung their long branches over the path. Now they were bare, but full, bursting buds gave promise of glory to come. On the right stretched a line of whitewashed picket fence. The kindly hand of Nature had not yet softened its ugliness enough to harmonize it with herself. On this side, halfway up the slope, which an Illinois farmer would call a hill, stood a house, so situated as to overlook the plantation, as well as the whole fertile valley of which it was a part, and the hills which bound it stretching away in receding perspective, green, purple, and blue in the far distance, where a glimpse of a gleaming river cut its way through the mountains.

The house had now only a semblance of its former grandeur. The ample piazzas had a warped appearance, and the roof lines seemed to be trying to conform themselves to the undulating sky-lines of the surrounding hills. From its evident antiquity it must have been built years "befo' de wah," and solidly, with extensive red-brick masonry underneath. Farther up the slope, on each side and behind, was the usual litter of small detached buildings and sheds formerly occupied by the throng of negro domestics that used to overrun, and were considered necessary to a Southern home of affluence. The neglected grounds had once been skilfully laid out. A broad drive led through one arched gateway in the now whitewashed picket fence, past the wide porches and off out through another arched gateway some distance away, and directly in front of the house was an old fountain

with well-cemented basin, long since gone dry. Giant acacias and mimosas drooped slender branches over it, and tall forest trees arched the drive, while all manner of ornamental shrubbery and vines ran riot over the winding paths and dry garden beds. Heavy timber in great variety covered the broad slope of land above and around, up to the sky-line, and the tinkle of cow-bells was heard at intervals as the patient creatures that bore them browsed among the undergrowth.

Mr. Ridgeway and his granddaughter paused as they turned to enter the gateway. He looked at the neglected home, she at the glowing distance.

"It is pathetic, this faded grandeur," he said. "So much is gone forever, eager happy lives, whose ambitions and hopes are ended, and whose labor is ending in this ruin, desolation."

Portia shaded her eyes with her hand. "Look at the other side, grandfather. This beautiful little valley in the sunlight, it is like one of God's smiles on the earth. It makes me think of his wonderful promises to humanity, so sheltered and safe, as if it lay in the hollow of his hand; and off there beyond that shining line of the river, it looks, when the sun is setting, as if it opened into heaven. Of course, the ruined home is pathetic, as you say, but only because it represents one of our great human failures, don't you think? They failed to adjust themselves to divine laws. I don't mean that the people were wicked, but the home was founded on a curse, and this is the end."

"Perhaps, Portia, yes. The view is a never-failing delight, certainly."

"This whitewashed fence appeals more to me. It speaks of one poor old soul's faithfulness to his master's memory and the past dignity of the family. Alexander did it; he told me 'Ol' mars'r al'us kep' t'ings mighty fine an' tidy. He done hyahd folkses f'om de No'f comin' an' 'lowed he 'd fix hit up li'l' fo' ol' mars'r's sake.' So he whitewashed the fence and arches, and then put what lime he had left on his little cabin. It went halfway round. The back and one side are bare. Poor fellow, he was so proud of it!"

"Yes, poor old fellow, but it was well the lime gave out when it did, or he would have begun on the house. There is your mother. Well, Portia, do your own way. It is usually a good way. I will help all in my power, but don't attempt too much, child."

A slight, delicate woman in black, wrapped in a soft white shawl, emerged from the doorway as he spoke. Portia ran lightly up the drive to meet her.

"We have had such a good time together, mamma deary," she cried, "only never before in such a perfectly charming place. The walks around here are as romantic as they are in books. I shall be so glad when you can go too." She gathered the fleecy shawl close under her mother's chin, and kissed her on one cheek, then on the other. "See these little iris. I found them growing along by the roadside, just anywhere."

"Oh, they are lovely, and fragrant too," said her mother, taking the cluster from Portia's warm, plump hand into both her own thin, cold ones, and the three generations entered this old Southern home

together. The father and daughter bore a strong resemblance to each other, but the granddaughter was of a quite different type.

Within, the mansion presented a less neglected and more homelike aspect than without, owing to the continued gracious and home-making presence for the last two or three months of Portia Van Ostade. This rambling old house, with twenty acres of the wooded hillside, and nine hundred dollars in her own right, had been bequeathed to her by her grand-uncle, Oscar Van Ostade. A strange bequest it had seemed to the family at the time. It was now their sole dependence. "Portia's white elephant," they had called it, and the question arose, what could she do with it? It could never be sold; no one would go to live in that far-away place. "We will just let it lie," said Grandfather Ridgeway, good-humoredly; "the interest on the money will pay the taxes, and keep it in repair," and he put the deed away among his private papers. Four years afterwards the great treasure-box was exhumed from a huge heap of débris, and the deed taken from it, a woful bit of charred parchment.

To-day, as they entered the sitting-room, a wood fire burned brightly in the huge red-brick fireplace.

"Ah, this is pleasant," said Mr. Ridgeway; "it makes a cheerful room of this, after all."

"Now, grandfather," said Portia, reproachfully, "are n't you glad we have my 'white elephant' to come to? But I know you said that 'after all' because you had such a forlorn time trying to manage here those first few weeks all alone, and these great piazzas keep out the sun so."

"I am an ungrateful wretch, I fear," he replied; "your grand-uncle Oscar must have had a prophetic soul." He dropped wearily into his armchair and, leaning back, closed his eyes. The two women looked lovingly at him, and exchanged glances.

Mrs. Van Ostade put the flowers in water and then lay down on the couch. Portia seated herself in a low rocker and began sewing on some blue denim that lay piled on a chair before her. She was making portières for one of the upper rooms. They remained silent for some time, and then began chatting quietly about the future.

"You must not give up your music even if we are living an isolated life. It may not always be so; it must not," said her mother.

"When I saw you really on the road to recovery, mamma," Portia laid a broad hem and creased it in place with a firm pressure of her thumb, "I — I advertised for boarders. Don't, mamma; such a look of horror makes me shiver. I knew you would call me crazy, but think, here I am, young, strong, and poor. Desperately poor we shall be. When the little sum we have now is gone, we shall have nothing at all to live on even from day to day, and grandpapa won't hear of our touching the little legacy that came to me with this property, and if we did how short a time it would last! I have simply faced the fact. Either I must go away from you both to earn for us all, or you must live in some stuffy city while I teach, for I won't be dependent on relatives, and you would not have me. If I make a profession of my music, I must travel, and we should be parted. This surely is best."

She spoke hurriedly, vehemently, her hands dropped passively in her lap, her face averted, and her eyes fixed on the dry fountain without. There the sun shone warmly. The leafless trees cast sharp shadows on the road and the piazza floor. Two bright little green lizards darted over the gray old stone edge of the fountain, overgrown in places with woodbine which quivered in the breeze. Her grandfather shifted his position with a little nervous movement, but did not open his eyes. Portia, turning suddenly, saw two tears course down her mother's pale cheeks, which were quickly wiped away. Instantly she was on her knees with her arms around the little woman, cuddling her, comforting her, with a woman's divination using arguments most potent to dispel the sorrowful foreboding she knew was the cause of them.

"Why," she laughed in a smothered way, hiding her face in her mother's neck, "before our various calamities, as you call them, I thought I was the happiest girl in existence. I did n't know what happiness was then. I lived in a misty halo of sentimentalism, dreaming of living for art alone, and pure devotion to a sort of a something or other, I guess I did n't know what; and people were entirely left out, and you, little mamma, were letting me think it was noble, and all that. Listen, mamma, that awful fire has swept away all that nonsense along with our wealth, and has let a little real light into my befogged brain. I don't say this just to comfort you; I never was so truly happy as I am now, here, planning for us all, since you began to recover. I never had so many lovely things all to

myself before, — you and grandpapa, and all nature, mountains, streams, woods, and wonderful wild places; how I love them!" She lifted her head and drew in her breath as if she were out in the woods breathing the freshness and fragrance.

Her mother drew her fingers through Portia's fluffy hair. "But when your boarders come, you won't have it all to yourself any more, and that money —"

"Don't talk about the money. I must do things right, or not at all. The fountain must be set going, and horses and carriage bought. I must train some of the most hopeful material about me into good housemaids to help Maggie, dear soul. Help costs but little, and I shall keep all I need. I have thought it all out, mamma. Mr. Hacket will keep me in supplies sent daily from Asheville. They have very good markets there, Mr. Clark tells me."

"Who is he?"

"He is the station agent here, and is a Northern man. He seems to have some genuine refinement."

"Are there none of the real old Southern families here who have culture?"

"Yes, but they are so far apart, and seem to be so dispirited. I have n't had a chance to meet them yet. You are not vexed, mamma, that I did n't ask you? I could n't; you were too ill. You are not strong enough now."

"How could I be vexed, deary? Yet I always said, if I ever should be thrown on my own resources, I never would resort to keeping boarders."

"My advertisements have been answered, mamma. Mrs. Percy is coming first. She put the idea in my

head, writing me and begging to come; I wrote her I should have her to practise on."

"She is lovely and lovable. Well, as you say, something must be done. Your head is like your father's, I can trust it; still, don't be too sanguine, and think. But there, it is all right; think what you please, do what you please. Your sunny nature is your safety, and action is always better than foreboding."

Mr. Ridgeway rose, and paced the floor, his hands behind his back, and his head drooped forward. He was about to speak, when a light tap was heard at the door, and the same instant a woman of thirty-eight or forty years, with red cheeks, dark blue eyes, and heavy black hair, put her head into the room.

"Miss Porrtia, arre ye's herre? There 's a black nagur gurrel out by, settin' on me clane chair, wid 'er two feet on me clane flurre, an' be the powers, whin I would tell 'er ye's were out waalkin' wid yer gran'fetherr an' it's takin' 'ersilf aff she 'd betherr be, did n't she jist pit 'er basket doun, an' 'ersilf the same, an' 'It 's stayin' herre I 'll be,' sez she, 'fur I seed the young leddy an' the ould jintleman down bi the brranch yanderr,' sez she. 'Bi phwat brranch?' sez I, 'an' surre wharre else 'ould they be,' sez I, 'fer the woods is full of thim,' sez I, an' there she be 's this minut, an' she that black ye's 'ould smootch yer two hands wid the touch av 'er."

"That 's the one we passed, then." Portia rose quickly. "I slandered her, for she got here before us. Never mind, Maggie, the black won't come off, you know that."

"More 's the pity, thin," said Maggie as they disappeared together.

"The woods is full of them," said Mr. Ridgeway, smiling. "Well done, Maggie."

"Good faithful soul! Portia has her strong Irish arm to lean on," said Mrs. Van Ostade.

"I was surprised when Maggie announced her intention of coming with us," he replied.

"I was not; it would have broken her heart if Portia had left her. She has loved Portia since she was a baby, and seems to think she is a child still. She is in years, yet I have given every care into her hands; she has gathered up the reins which fell from my useless ones. But, oh, I hate to see that money touched."

"The money is nothing, Clara. The pity is deeper than that. What is her ability worth here? What can she look forward to? Where will it end? We have entered a narrow lane leading to a blank wall, with all the loveliest things of life, which should be hers, on the other side. Here I am stranded, too old to begin again; it — it is — What have we come to? I can scarcely hold up my head under it."

"No, father, you were brought to this, you did n't come to it. We must be watchful of her, and wait. A few years of struggle may only broaden and deepen her character. She has only lost worldly prospects and wealth as yet; she is heart whole."

A wide hall ran the whole length of the house, opening at either end on immense piazzas. Portia and Maggie traversed its whole length, passed out through the farther door, and entered the house again at the far end of the back piazza, where a long

ell addition to the main part meandered a little distance up the hill, forming a court-like square, open and sunny now, but later in the season shaded by a spreading, magnificent old locust-tree. This room in the ell was Maggie's own sitting-room, low, pleasant, and spotlessly clean. It was the pride of her big Irish heart. Here sat the young negress awaiting them.

CHAPTER II

THE RETURN TO OLD SCENES AND ACQUAINTANCES

THE sun was setting. Its farewell glance threw a celestial glory over Patterson. The dingy station, the ugly boarding-house with false front, the store and barber's pole before it, the rude blacksmith shed with creaking sign on which was painted an impossible horse, all were bathed in the same golden light that made splendid God's handiwork. The hills, the mountains, rising peak above peak, and the wonderful rocks, each from its own point of vantage sent back toward its Creator a portion of the radiance streaming over it. The miracle of the spring was being enacted anew in and all about Patterson. Trees stiffened and grew strong with sweet sap filling their veins, — tender greens of hillside and woodland growing daily deeper and richer; all the charming phalanx of mountain shrubbery bursting into bewildering profusion of bloom; ugly things becoming hidden by the young greenness of the earth; old stumps by the roadside, decaying logs, and last year's dead leaves slowly, by their own death, nourishing the wild tangle of fragrance and color that covered them, being thus, in the lavish provision of nature, themselves resurrected. The mountain streams laughed loudly in their opulence.

Up the long slope to the southwest crept the incoming mail-train, now seen turning an outward curve, now hidden by an intervening hill, — a live little, consequential demon, impudently puffing its hot breath toward heaven, trailing after it a long line of vaporous smoke, as if vainly trying to obscure the gorgeous pageantry of the western sky, in zealous self-assertiveness. Crawling cautiously over the long dizzy trestle, then darting on again, it neared the little station, gave two demoniacal shrieks that were caught up by the echoes of the hills, and paused a moment with insistent hissing while it emitted one traveller, a pair of completely collapsed mail-bags, and a trunk which was violently hurled to the platform, as if those who handled it were trying to bestow on one poor box all the rough usage they would have given other baggage had they had it.

The traveller, a young man, turned with a quick shrug as his trunk struck the platform; the little train impatiently bustled off. A lank, leather-colored, disconsolate-looking mail-agent dawdled away with the collapsed bags, and the traveller was left sole mark for twenty or more pairs of eyes belonging to as many professional loungers of Patterson, who had been waiting for two mortal hours, with a patience born of inherited lassitude, for the evening mail, although they were well aware it was not due until six-thirty, and was usually late at that.

Apparently unaware of their languid yet critical scrutiny, he walked around a moment, taking a general survey of the surroundings, then disappeared in the little hole of a depot and began

talking with the station-agent. The loungers ceased supporting their lank forms against the buildings opposite and gathered in knots, spitting tobacco juice and speculating as to the probable business of the stranger, his destination, and other questions concerning him, hard to answer without positive knowledge, but affording these meditative loungers endless opportunity for the exercise of their peculiar function. Presently the object of their curiosity appeared, and crossing the track with alert step, came toward them. His hat was set a little back, and his forehead, fair and open, showed a slight red line where it had pressed. His hair, damp with perspiration, was soft and curling underneath it. He approached one of the groups, and held out his hand with a pleasant smile to a powerfully built man, lean as Pharaoh's lean kine.

"Mr. Patterson," he said. The individual addressed started as if he were a huge dried specimen, well wired, on which the traveller was experimenting, and which was electrified and set into spasmodic, irresistible motion by the touch of that human magnet. His face expanded until the radiating wrinkles at the corners of his eyes deepened into folds and creases. He caught at the top of his trousers, jerking them violently up, grasped the hand extended to him in both his own, and moved it vigorously up and down.

"Why! Bless my soul, boy! Gen'l'men, bless my soul! Ef here ain't ol' Gen'l Marshall himself come tu life again. Gen'l'men, shore 'nuff."

"Wall now, Mr. Marshall, the sight of ye is good foh sore eyes," said another.

"Sho'ly, we ah right glad tu see yu," said a small man, trying to reach over taller ones for a hand-shake. There was instant recognition of him on all sides. Only a few new-comers stood aloof, smilingly looking on.

"John Marshall did ye say? Jes' give me a look at 'im now. I'd give my eyes, what they is lef' of 'em, foh a look at Gen'l Marshall's boy." The speaker, an old man, limped from behind the counter of the notion store where he had been busied with a customer.

"Here he is, Mr. Hackett, the same boy who used to run his hounds through your cotton-fields after rabbits. What a plague he must have been to you!" answered the young man, turning quickly. He was shaking hands with one and another, calling each by name.

"Ye don't seem to forgit none of us," said one.

"Oh, no. You have changed very little."

"You 'll see changes 'nuff, I reckon, in them 'at was small fry when ye lef'."

"He only needs tu look at his se'f tu know that. Ye were only a striplin' when ye lef', and look at ye now, bless ye, yer own father over again."

"I knew him," said the old man, — "boy an' man I knew him. He saved my life jes' befoah he lost his own. The Unions was too strong foh us, the gen'l was orderin' a retreat, when a minie bullet tore th'ough this leg, and down I went right in the path of the cav'lry. Youah father reined up, and says he, 'Hackett, give me yeh hand.' I tell ye I grabbed foh 'im like despair. He hauled me over the horse in front of him, and took me to the shade

of a big hick'ry and give me his water-flask, and says he, 'There, lie low. They 'll come foh th' wounded a'terwards;' and there he was lying with the dead ten minutes later, was yeh father."

"Thank you for telling me that. My father was my hero. You will tell me more of him sometime?"

"We kin all take a turn at that," said the little man.

"Gen'l'men," said fat Mr. Budd, putting his hand in his pockets and turning puffily to address the crowd, "ah we-all treating the young squire jes' right? Walk in here an' take a drink all roun'. I 'll stan' treat foh th' crowd, gen'l'men, in honoh of young Squire John Marshall's return."

"Naou, I reckon yu ah 'bout right thar, cunnel," acquiesced half a dozen, with languid alacrity.

The sun had entirely disappeared, leaving the earth wrapped in still shadows of softly deepening blues and grays. The air of a spring evening in the mountains, delicious with subtle, delicate odors, swept past them all, and gently lifted John Marshall's hair. He was thinking of his father. Looking into the dirty saloon, a disgust seized him as he imagined himself there, drinking corn whiskey with these tobacco-saturated men. Old neighbors though they were, he knew them only through boyish recollections, as friends by force of circumstances, not of his father's own choosing. Looking into their faces, kindled for him with kindly light, he shrank from giving offence, yet go in there he could not. He must do neither. His thoughts flew rapidly as he wiped the crown of his hat with his handkerchief. He had kindly feeling for them

all, for some even respect, yet there was that in himself which raised a barrier between him and them they might not cross. To drink with them and treat in return, would secure their friendship. To refuse might make some of them his lasting enemies. Should he pay for their drinks and excuse himself? His hand wandered to his pocket. He had never been impelled to do such a thing before in exactly this way. No, the whole thing was disgusting, he would risk it.

His deliberation was but for a moment. "Your reception does me good, gentlemen. A young man could n't ask better of his father's old neighbors than the greeting you have given me. I am here to look after my mother's affairs, and will see you often, I hope, when we can talk over old times, but now I can't accept Mr. Budd's invitation. I am as hungry as if I had just returned from a coon hunt, so I 'll bid you all good-evening, and many thanks for your kindness." He took up his valise, and had entered the boarding-house before they realized that he was gone, and if they drank to honor his return they must do so without him. Since Budd's invitation was not repeated, they chose not to do so.

"Young squire is mighty sudden," said that individual.

"He 's not changed much, I reckon, allus was quick 'nd clever as a boy," said Patterson, pulling at the string of a dirty tobacco pouch. He took from it a portion of the contents, which hung from his thumb and forefinger stringily, like a limp little dead mouse, and dropping his lower jaw put

the brown tuft in the cavern thus formed. When his mouth was again ready for words, some of his companions had dropped into the saloon, others were untying their horses, and all were talking of young John Marshall, and making conjectures concerning him and his mother, whom they had not even asked after, partly from delicacy, as they did not know whether she were living or dead.

Mr. Hackett was wrapping up a card of white porcelain buttons for a stout colored woman. "Who was dat ah man I seed yu all talkin' tu as I come up?" she asked.

"That was old General Marshall's son, Mr. John Marshall."

"Laws naow, yu doan' say! I nevah knowed de boy. He's growed tu putty foh a man. I kin 'membah him right well, ol' gen'l uset tu be my mars'r. Cl'issy, she'd give her eyes tu see him. I nuvah seed no body grieve like she done grieve foh dat boy. Come on, Jess." She took the hand of a fat, round-eyed little black boy and ambled away.

When John entered the dusty little parlor of the boarding-house, he found Hanford Clark, the station-agent, waiting for him.

"They have a room for me? Thank you. I have had a narrow escape. I might have been in this hole next door drinking corn whiskey, but I refused the treat, preferring a retreat."

"'The Asylum for Aged and Decayed Punsters' is near, did you know?" said his friend. "I shall take you to it for a bad case to-morrow."

"I am content, most noble Hanford; yet prithee tell me, are poor travellers fed as well as housed in

this secluded wayside inn? If not, then I must needs eat thee, since I no longer can endure this fast, and since, forsooth, a poor and meagre meal were better than no meal at all."

"Nay, gracious John, for soon you will be fed with corn meal. Other than corn meal is no meal, and on it shall you feed three meals a day, like any other hog, until your soul shall utter this wild cry, 'No meal for me to-day, thanks, no, no meal.'"

"'Et tu, Bruti?' In vulgar parlance, are you also reduced to making puns?"

"It's catching. Well, old man, I ordered chicken to be served quickly (as it can be caught, killed, dressed, and cooked), hot corn bread, and a glass of milk. Black coffee at night is unhygienic. If you sleep after their hot bread and hog's lard, you may have it for breakfast."

They were in the unlighted parlor, their chairs tilted against the casing of the open windows, through which the sweet, cool air — the only luxury the place afforded — was gently blowing. Presently a negro boy entered carrying an unshaded kerosene lamp, which he deposited on the dusty table.

"De gen'l'man's suppah 's ready," said he.

John rose to follow. His friend looked at his watch. "I'll have your trunk brought over and landed in your room, and join you soon," he said.

"Hanford, you are the same kind, thoughtful fellow you were five years ago."

The agent caught the young man's shoulder and turning him about, looked in his face. He was a trifle older, and taller, and the smile with which he

regarded him was almost fatherly. "I have n't told one of these fellows here that I ever knew you," said he, "so keep mum." A look of surprise flashed into Marshall's face. "It 's all right, old man, we 'll have a good chat as soon as I look after your trunk. I 'm not due at the station for forty minutes."

John swallowed his supper, with more impatience than relish. Although the milk was sweet and good, the corn bread was soggy, the chicken tough, the butter greasy, and the sorghum molasses contained two hapless flies. Because their misery jarred on him he released them from slow, saccharine death, placing them on a soiled spot on the tablecloth. The smoky lamp stood in dangerous proximity to the bread. He moved it, and happening to glance up (he had thought himself sole occupant of the room), saw in the obscurity outside the radius of the lamp a white jacket, a row of white finger-nails, two shining eyes, and a wide set of gleaming teeth. The small black waiter who had announced supper was silently grinning and watching him.

"Hello, whose boy are you?" he said.

"Ain' nobody's boy, sah. I jes' b'longs tu my own se'f."

"Ah, indeed! You are a fortunate little chap. Some people, you know, belong to the devil." Why John said this he could not have told. Perhaps something in the uncanny appearance of the little imp suggested the remark. The boy's grin grew wider.

"Yes, sah."

"What 's your name?"

"Name Andy, sah."

"Is that all the name you have, just Andy?"

"No, sah."

"Well, what's the rest?"

Andy's great eyes rolled toward the ceiling as if he expected to find the rest of the name written there. "Name Andrew Jackson Franklin Abraham Lincum Wells, sah."

"Spoken like a man; that's the way to tell your name. Andrew-Jackson-Franklin-Abraham-Lincoln-Wells. Peculiar combination."

"Yes, sah, dey jes' calls me Andy heah'bouts."

"So you used to be one of old Colonel Wells' little niggers, did you?"

"Doan' know, sah."

"Who was your father?"

"Doan' know, sah."

"Well, who was your mother?"

"Name Linda, sah."

"Linda what?"

"Name Linda Angelina Wells, sah."

"I guess you must have been one of the old colonel's little niggers, then."

"Mammy say as haow I nuvva did n' b'long tu nobody, sah." Andy spoke with some warmth. Evidently the mother had fostered the idea in the child's mind that he had been born free.

Marshall smiled. In spite of his natural, inherited disbelief in the normal condition of the African race as a state of freedom, he respected the little rascal's pride in the thought of having been free born, although he was morally certain the boy's father was one called Unc' Jupe, whom Colonel Wells had sold off the plantation before the war to be rid of him.

And Marshall was right. Andy's mother had added Abraham Lincum to her boy's already extensive name, in gratitude to the great deliverer of her race, after the child was old enough to steal hens' eggs on her old "mars'r's" premises, to go with their bacon. And Andy was right also. He had no recollection of either master or mistress, and belonged to no one on the face of the earth but "he's own se'f." He was an anomaly and yet a type; a type of a new race which had sprung up since "de wah," a sort of retributive scourge to the Southern people for having — not iniquitously, perhaps, but blindly — kept a whole race of human beings in a state of moral and physical bondage and childish ignorance.

"Well, Andy, I won't dispute it, and here's a dime to help you take care of your precious possession."

"T'ankee, sah." Andy clapped the dime in his mouth.

Marshall rose from the table. At the door of the dining-room he paused a moment. "Andy, what's become of old Colonel Wells and the family?"

"Ol' Mars'r Cunnel daid, sah. Missy Cunnel, she mos' daid tu."

"Most dead! what do you mean?"

"She blin', sah, kyan see nuffin'. Mars'r Dick, he daown in Richmon'. Miss Angelina, she in Richmon' tu." The dime had loosened Andy's tongue. "An' Miss Katherine, she lib on de ol' place an' te'k kyah on ol' missy."

"What's become of the young captain?"

"Daid, sah, Miss Katherine she mou'nin' fo' him yit. She ain' du nuffin' but mou'n an' griebe.

Mammy say she b'leebe Miss Katherine she gwine die yit wid dat griebin', she dat so'-ha'ted."

A shadow crept over Marshall's face. As he closed the door, a woman met him in the hall carrying a lamp.

"Good-evenin'," she said. "Likely you are the gentleman who come in on the train. Your trunk's gone to your room, 'nd I was just goin' to take up your lamp." She stepped forward, expecting him to take it; but he moved aside, allowing her to pass.

"Thank you, I was looking for some one to show me my room."

The woman was tall and stout, and walked with a heavy rolling gait. She eyed the young man over the top of her glasses from head to foot. "They tell me you used to live here," she said. "Well, I'm sure you're welcome back, but it's a poor place to make a livin' in. I come f'm Ohio myself, 'nd goodness knows I wish 't I'd stayed there. Patterson is the slowest place 't I ever did see. Budd, he makes all the money they is here in his saloon. They ain't nobody here but what drinks."

Although tired, sad, and nervously irritated by her loquacity, Marshall answered pleasantly, —

"I never lived right here exactly. Patterson was not in existence when I left."

"You don't say. Well! And where have you been livin' all these years?"

"In San Francisco. I have an uncle there."

"So! And your paw is dead. Your maw, is she dead too? Where is she?"

Marshall winced. Her strident voice rasped on him. "My mother's home is in Cuba. She spends her winters there."

"You don't say! Well! And where does she spend the rest of her time? Is she comin' back here too?"

"I hardly think so." He ignored the rest of her question. She rolled on a step or two. He thought the catechism ended, when she faced about with a new question, —

"Who was your paw? I must 'a' heard tell o' him, all the years I been here, ever since they run the road through. I was one o' the very first 't did come, 'n' I 'm sure I wish 't — "

"My father was General Marshall," he replied, shifting impatiently from one foot to another.

"You don't say! Well! I have heard tell o' him, sure enough. He owned all the land hereabouts, 'nd all Patterson too, they tell me. Well! You don't say!" She rolled on a step and stopped again. "I suppose your maw must 'a' sold all this 'ere land to the railroad. How much 'd she get fer it, think? They tell me the house 's been took by some Chicago folks 'nd turned into a board'n'-house. Well! I guess they 'll make a lot keepin' boarders here, that 's what — "

"Pity my soul, madam, are you never going to show me my room? I mean — Beg pardon," he added, recoiling from his own rudeness. "If you will give me the lamp and direct me, I won't trouble you."

"Oh, that 's all right. Guess I better go ahead 'nd light th' way." She gathered her skirt in one

hand and began climbing the stair without delay. "Step a little careful here, this step 's broke 'nd may give way," she panted, as Marshall stumbled on in the shadow of her broad figure. "That's your door, firs' to th' lef'. I hope you 'll sleep well," she said, standing puffily at the top and pointing into the obscurity. "I'm sure I do the best I can fer my boarders, if they ain't nothin' in it, 'nd —"

"Thank you, thank you." Marshall took the lamp and moved on in haste, to check further conversation. As he pushed open the door, "firs' to th' lef'," it crowded against something piled against it.

"Hello, come in. Never mind obstacles," cried the voice of his friend from within.

Marshall wedged the door open about a foot, thrust the lamp through first, and edging in sideways, stepped over a pillow and confronted Hanford seated on the edge of the empty bedstead, with a feather in one hand and the lamp without the burner in the other.

"What 's all this?" said John, surveying the disordered box of a room. "Holding high carnival all by yourself in the dark?"

"Light enough to serve my purpose, and I 'm through now. I 'm saving you a little annoyance, my boy." He threw the feather out of the window, and taking the burner which lay on the sill with the dripping wick hanging outside, proceeded to screw it on the lamp, which he lighted and placed on the cluttered little washstand. Seeing John still holding his with a dazed air, he took it from him, cleared

another space, and set it down also, talking in a detached way as he worked.

"Sit down and take it easy a minute while I straighten things up," he said. "Finding your room inhabited, I began a work of extermination. You 'll find blood-suckers enough without sleeping with them. Coal oil is a good thing applied liberally with a feather, although the odor may not rival that of violets in spring. My first night here at Scrapp's was a memorable one. Before the moon silvered the mountain tops I rose and pitched every shred of my bedding out of the window, and spent the 'wee sma'' hours tilted back in one of these rickety chairs, reading my Bible. Smile; that's right, smile! You looked like a whipped dog when you came in. Was n't the supper to your taste? It's not bad reading; besides, I had nothing else to do for five good hours, unless to stand around and swear. Help a fellow on with those springs. Steady there. If we drop them, old Scrapp will be up to see if we're both drunk. He does nothing for the place but confer his suggestive name on it. His wife does the work. She ambles about, making the best of things. Never said a word about where she found the bedding next day, and the place was so thoroughly scrubbed I did n't have to repeat the performance for a month; but nowadays I don't trouble her, I work the thing with a kerosene lamp and a feather."

"Only you would have thought of this. You are your old self, Hanford Clark."

"Now my housework is done, I have just twenty minutes for gossip," said Clark; "then I must be on

duty, — there's an eight-o'clock freight, — so fire away."

"First then, why in Heaven's name must n't I speak of our friendship?"

"Because I have not, that is all. You wish to untangle things peaceably; take my advice. Give me the cold shoulder in the presence of your father's old neighbors. Moreover, if your life in San Francisco impregnated you with Northern ideas, drop them for a time or you will bring up against a wall of quiet opposition that even your father's reputation will not take you over." He paused, and Marshall was silent.

"Two years have given me some experience. The first station-agent being a Southern man, they naturally thought he was ousted for me. I have lived down that odium now, however; at least, the Patterson faction treat me well. They rather favor the company. You see, they received a good price for their land, and your mother was to have had the same price for hers, but her lawyer here, I. M. Monk —"

"What! Does mother still keep Monk? I always — Beg pardon. Go ahead."

"That's all right. Say on, anything you please."

"I am surprised. She knew I disliked the man. Mother has been reticent about business until she wrote the letter that brought me here. Even then she did not mention Monk by name. She used to detest Yankees, but she is shrewd. She knows they are good business men, however obnoxious they may be otherwise."

"I can give you the ins and outs of the matter. She has left you too much in the dark. You are

at a disadvantage. It was this way. The land-owners between here and Milton wished the company to put the road through Pine Gap, to open up their property there for sale, and Monk hoodwinked them into sending him to negotiate the business for them. Then the old fox persuaded the company that they would save fifty miles of steep grade if they put the road into Milton from the north, building that trestle you went over just this side of Carlton, and skirting the French Broad. So they did, and left Pine Gap forty miles off the line of travel. Never went near the place."

"What was that for?"

"He schemed the whole thing out to bring his own land over in Broadgate into the market. He owned a thousand acres there. Moreover he screwed a bonus out of every Broadgate land-owner who made anything out of the transaction, and worried another big payment out of the company on your mother's property, in consideration of his services, (I would look after that if I were you; I doubt if she ever received a cent more than the original price), and sold his own land at an immense profit."

"Where does Patterson's quarrel come in in all this?"

"He agreed the whole of Blue Hill here should be made over to the company for a mere nominal sum, as a site for a hotel to bring travel to the road, in consideration of their making that detour around by Broadgate."

"But, as I remember it, the Chaplains owned that."

"They own one half and your mother the other. He has been disposing of her property as he likes, and telling her what he pleases. The Chaplains also own land at Pine Gap, and Jud swears his half of the hill shall never be owned by a set of 'damned thieving Yankees' until they pay his price, which he has put at enough to cover the worth of this and all his Pine Gap property put together."

"How on earth did Monk ever bring about the agreement between Chaplain and the company in the first place? He had only authority over mother's part."

"He trapped Chaplain first, by talking about getting the road through Pine Gap. Oh, he's smooth as grease."

"Why can't Chaplain be brought to terms then?"

"He employed a lawyer from the city, and between them they found a way out of the bargain."

"Well, some of the heaviest stockholders are San Francisco men, as you know, and Uncle Darius has set his heart on having me build that hotel, and I'll do it."

"He's one of the largest owners, but that must not be known here; you never will build it if it is."

"First I'll dismiss Monk and then see Judson and get him interested pecuniarily." A look of doubt passed over Hanford's face. Marshall smiled. "It can be done," he said; "it's got to be done, that's all."

"All the Pine Gap faction are down on Monk. They'd pitch him off his trestle into Mill River if they could," said Hanford.

"Naturally; but I fail to see how all this necessitates my giving you the cold shoulder. I can't do it, old fellow."

"The whole facts of the case necessitate it. We are all in the same rank hole. Monk is a Northern man, and his meanness and double dealing have brought distrust down on us. He has the hatred of the whole community here, and of course some of that odium falls on me. Since I am well posted, and an employee of the company, if you seem confidential with me, they will distrust you. Now you are one of them, which is to your advantage."

"I see," said John.

"Here's another complication. An especial election comes off soon, to fill the place of circuit judge. As all the places interested in the road squabble are in the circuit, there is war to the knife. The Broadgate faction have succeeded in getting Monk's name on one of the tickets, and if he has the negro vote he stands a good chance. He is top of the heap in Broadgate, is a great swell there, and sticks at no kind of wire-pulling; is engaged to Senator White's daughter, and all that sort of thing. She is an old-maid, as raw-boned as he is, but he wants the office. The other party, as I happen to know, have some bulldozing scheme on foot, and naturally they look on every Northern man as a spy on their actions. Judson Chaplain is their candidate."

"Monk's a rascal," said John; "I'll settle him as far as mother's affairs are concerned."

"Take my advice, and be prudent," continued his friend. "Strike up a casual acquaintance with

me after a while. In the mean time, be sure I'll serve you in any way in my power."

"You are an out-and-out true friend, Hanford — you always were. I'll do as you say, but it's mighty hard on me."

"You won't find everything on such an easy footing as when you were a boy."

"Oh, no, but, then, everything is in such a confounded mess here in the South. What right have the negroes to the ballot anyway? Children handling edged tools, no more fit to govern themselves than that mule out there by the fence, nor as much."

Hanford Clark burst into a laugh. "No need of any suggestions from me, I see. You'll pass with this crowd. How came they here in the first place? Of their own free will or through stress of circumstances? (Mild way of putting it.) What right have they here? Have they any rights? If not, why not?"

"Oh, come! we can't argue, Hanford. We were always cats and dogs on this point. We know each other's arguments as we know our grammars. It's right here that the trouble lies. While they were kept where they belonged there was no difficulty. We needed them, were even fond of them, petted them, and all that sort of thing; but given absolute freedom, turned loose like a pack of wild colts, given power to govern us perforce when they never knew how to take care of themselves, I don't wonder. It is too much to be borne. I know it was only war policy at first, but now to submit to such a state of affairs is madness, that's all, — sheer madness."

"Look here, my man, affairs have changed down here. Ten or twelve years makes a big difference. You will find the negroes better prepared to handle the ballot than a lot of your ignorant whites up North are. They are pretty intelligent. They confide in the Northerners here and get a fairly good idea of the political issues. Even those who can't read—"

"Yes, I see. Men like Monk prime them up. Fine confidant he is for them. I guess a little wholesome bulldozing would be a good thing for the whole set of white scoundrels as well as black. There, old man, don't let the glow die out of your face in that way; I love to see it if it does shine on the wrong side,—the shadow side, so to speak." They were silent a moment; then Marshall added, "Maybe you are more in the right than my prejudices will let me believe."

Clark laughed, and looked at his watch. "You think you are right in these arguments of ours, and I know I am; but you know how to be generous, at all events, and so stand that much ahead of me in an argument."

John sat lazily tilted back in his chair, his hands clasped behind his head. His friend rose and paced restlessly about the room. "The same old stride," said John. "How did you ever blunder into such a place and position as this? The company is looking up a little in the matter of employees. A college-bred station-agent, and— What are you ruminating about now?"

"I must go," said Hanford, looking absently at his watch again. He opened the door half-way,

shut it, and walked over to the window, where he stood with his back to his friend. "You have given me no news yet of your mother. Does she come North this summer?"

"Yes; she is in New York by this time. She wrote she should sail two weeks ago."

"So early! Alone?"

"No; Marguerite is with her, of course." Hanford shifted himself uneasily, and began pointing a pencil with his knife. Marshall was not looking at him, and went on wearily: "She could n't live without Marguerite, and yet the child is heartless, perfectly heartless. Mother seems wrapped up in her, though."

"She seemed to me to have heart enough, and a good one at that."

"A perfect little demon when she can twist a man around her finger. Mother would have had us tied together three years ago if she could have had her way. You knew we were engaged; but that was mother's doing, not mine."

"I knew. Your mother told me." Hanford turned half round, and gave his friend a keen scrutiny, still occupied with his knife. John talked on.

"I had a few words with the midget, and she confessed she did not care for me any more than she did for an old shoe, nor as much; for an old shoe was comfortable, and when I taxed her for pretending to care, she admitted she did it to have peace at home, and to — as she said — 'keep other frauds at bay.'"

"But your mother said you were devoted to her."

"I was, — am still, for that matter. I would gladly see her married to my dearest friend if I thought he could manage her. We agreed amicably to break the engagement and keep it to ourselves until they were back in Cuba, when she was to break it to mother, as she said, 'little at a time.'"

"And do you mean to tell me you never have had a pang of regret at such a dénouement?"

"Never since we settled it to both our likings, but many a one before."

Hanford's eyes shone with a peculiar light as he regarded his friend. "I wonder if I am a fool!" he said quietly, shutting his knife with a sharp click. Marshall looked up in sudden surprise. The incoming freight whistled the same instant as it neared the long trestle, and Hanford was gone.

CHAPTER III

PAST AND PRESENT

JOHN MARSHALL rose, and shook himself impatiently. "Straws," he muttered. "So that's the way the wind sits. Poor fellow! He's too good for her." He moved restlessly about, then stood staring out of the window. "She'll make a fool of him. I can't interfere. If I write mother to leave her in New York, she'll be dead set to start for Patterson on the next train." He whistled softly a minute, then threw up the window as far as it would go, seized his hat, and passing out of the room, turned the key in the door. He felt his way along the upper corridor, and by the feeble light of a lamp in the hall below found his way out into the night.

The train was thundering up to the station, and Marshall turned toward the silence of the hills. A moment he looked off on their softened outlines, in the bewitching moonlight, to get his bearings. "The blacksmith shop stands just as it used," he thought, "but all this other trash has been dumped here since. Even Hackett's store is new. Well, so wags the world; every man for himself, and all for the shillings."

He turned down a familiar road, walking aimlessly, drinking in the sweet cool air, which scarcely stirred the leaves. Faintly in the distance came the cry of a whippoorwill, sharply answered from

a great gum-tree over his head. He looked up, feeling the impulse of his boyhood to throw a stone into the tree to discover the bird's whereabouts, and saw the moon looking down through a network of branches from the crest of a distant hill. "She seems to touch the earth," he said.

The road made a sudden turn down a declivity of broad shelving rocks to the ford below, and he heard the sound of the stream mingling with the noise of frogs and the chirping of tree-toads. He stopped on the footbridge to listen, and dropped a stone into the water which sent back the sparkle of a thousand gems. His heart expanded under the influence of this sweet solitude. This was a part of his boyhood. Why had he never visited it in all these years? Why had he ever left it?

"There 's a deep pool behind that boulder where old Alexander gave me my first lesson in fishing. I wonder if he 's still alive." He threw a stone toward the great rock. It splashed into the water, and instantly the noise of the frogs ceased.

"They 've been croaking there all these years," he said. The moonlight spread broadly over the little bridge, leaving one end in dense shadow where Marshall leaned on the railing, completely hidden. Suddenly the sounds of horses' hoofs and men's voices broke the stillness.

"'T ain't no use s'arch'n' these parts, he 's highah up th' maount'n. Black devils! Thar 's plenty ut 'll hide 'im."

"Naw, he 's feared o' th' maount'n. They 're pizen on him thar. He 'll make fer th' low country 'nd git cl'ar that-a-way." There were four riders.

They stopped in the stream to let their horses drink, and Marshall recognized one as the man he had greeted earlier in the evening.

"Patterson don't go much on a niggah till he gits a fa'r chance tu shoot 'im."

"Yas, we-all takes a lively int'rust in a niggah these days when we kin let daylight into 'im."

"Wall now, they is some good uns," said a little man perched on a tall, raw-boned horse. "Thar 's that ar Josephus, he 's stiddy an' hones', but they all needs a mastah ovah 'em. I alluz was fa'r, even tu a niggah. All they need is tu be kep' whar they belong."

As they dashed away past the place where Marshall stood screened by the shadows and veil of willow branches, Patterson's horse shied violently. "Whoah thar," he shouted, and turning fired his revolver into the bank above John's head. "I reckon thar 's a niggah creepin' round thar ut 's skeered 'im. I 'd put a bullet through every durned black hide in th' country 'f I hed th' chance."

John Marshall shuddered and walked out into the moonlight, feeling as if he had awakened from an ugly dream; but he sauntered on. One sensation would be all he could reasonably expect to experience in one evening, and he would not be shot at if he kept in the light where he would show for a white man. Although shocked, he smiled, thinking of the time when "niggers" were too valuable to be shot at, at random. A man would as soon think of shooting at his blooded mare in sport nowadays, as he would then of hazarding a shot into a thicket at a "nigger."

"That is like Patterson," he thought. "Cool and daring, but a good friend withal. And the little man is right; under masters they did well enough, but in these changed circumstances they must be insufferable."

Like the jack-rabbits and gophers of California, the negroes were well enough when they committed no depredations; when they did, it was quite proper to hunt them down. There were too many of them — more than were needed. The small man on the tall horse seemed to have on an official coat and manner. Marshall wondered what was up, as he sauntered on, mechanically taking the road which led past his boyhood's home. How familiar it all was! Every gnarled old gum-tree and boulder brought back to him events of those free and happy days.

"It is not so long ago," he thought. Even the wagon ruts seemed the very ones the loaded tobacco wagons cut then, as the negroes, whistling and cracking their whips at the mule teams, wound their way to the next town. Some of them were trusted to do all the business of selling the long train of loads in their charge, even bargaining for the price and taking the money home. "Shoot one of those niggers down in the dark? Not much," he thought. There was old Thomas, the preacher at the negro quarters, black as ebony, noted for honesty and good sense. He was his master's best friend in one sense. He married John's mammy, but that was before John could remember. She often told him about how they were married by a white minister, and they were all given a holiday; how "mars'r" was away at the time, and

how he swore when he returned and found her mistress had made her marry old Thomas during his absence.

John thought of his slight, dark, imperious mother, reigning as queen in the old home. All the servants feared her. The piccaninnies dodged round doorways and corners at her approach. She seldom had them punished, but they feared her nevertheless. Only Mammy Clarissa seemed to be without this fear. She waited on her mistress day and night without complaint, yet never seemed submissive. She was tall, fairer than her mistress, and wore always a silk turban and white gown. Her step was long and rapid. She moved easily, but with the sudden directness which indicated underlying force. Always quiet and inscrutable, her expression seldom changed; only when he was tired and crept into her lap in the twilight, she laughed, and rocked him in her arms, and told him stories of the time when she "war a li'l' gal, an' her mammy war mos' like her." She told him of a great city by the sea where she had lived, of the ships, and the moonlight on the water, and the songs of the negroes rowing boats full of pleasure-seekers past her "ol' mars'r's haouse" in the summer evenings.

"I war right happy den, honey, right happy," she used to say, "a-rollin' on de grass an' a-listenin' tu de watah. Ol' mars' uset tu go dar eve'y y'ar w'en de long hot days come. Missus she uset tu sit in de po'ch an' sing tu ol' mars'r in de dark, w'en I war li'l' gal."

In the years that had passed, it was Mammy Clarissa's caresses he remembered more than his

mother's, and yet she never had seemed to him to be exactly a human being, as he applied that term to his mother or himself. She was his father's chattel, no more, no less. As a child, he loved her with a child's delight in her affection and caresses; as a man he thought of her kindly, and wondered if she were still living.

"I must hunt her up, if she is, and give her something. Faithful old soul!" he said.

She had a boy of his own age, he remembered,—a pale, lithe imp, with eyes as black as sloes, wilful, always getting into scrapes and domineering over the other piccaninnies. His mistress petted him, but his mother paid no more attention to him than to any other of the swarming raft on the place. She never allowed him in the house. "Yo' stay dar wha' yo' b'longs," she would say when his black eyes peered into her face from some doorway. This boy had been John's own little body-servant, playmate, and scapegoat, as prolific in mischievous schemes as his young master was daring in carrying them out. Clarissa had a younger boy, black as the ace of spades. John wondered what had become of him. He thought of the numerous house-servants, the loquacious old cook, the little "house birds," who "toted ashes, fotched watah," and loitered on all the numberless errands of the household. He smiled as he thought how their black legs would fly and the white soles of their feet twinkle, as they darted away from the kitchen door, with a splint broom scudding after, hurled by the irate cook for some impudence from their "sassy maoufs."

He thought of Alexander and his tribe of assistants. Every servant of importance had corps of under helpers being trained and "fotched up." He thought of the mellow voices of the field hands singing together in the quarters on just such moonlit evenings as this. He was never allowed among them unless accompanying his father on his rounds over the plantation when his political duties permitted his being at home, but they were fond of the young master, who sometimes dispensed their semi-annual allowance of rations and clothing, adding thereto small gifts from his own pocket money.

"I wonder if I could remember them all!" he said, counting them off by their names and nicknames. Ah! the busy old place in those days teemed with exuberance of life.

Although happy, his boyhood still lacked in some part that which childhood should have to be looked back upon with tenderest, sweetest memories. He was fed, petted, and indulged by Mammy Clarissa and the household servants, and reproved by his mother for his misdemeanors. Hospitality reigned in the home. Distinguished political friends of his father's came for a week's relaxation, or a day's sport, and in summer his mother's Cuban relatives and friends thronged around her, and all was gayety and life.

How well he remembered loitering about the piazza, watching the languid, dark-eyed ladies in their full luminous silks and soft muslins, fluttering their fans, and chatting in low tones, sometimes in French or Spanish, but oftenest in English made soft by their melodious drawl. There their partners

came for them for the dance, or sat beside them smoking; there wines were served by lithe young negresses. How he loved the merriment and badinage, and the soft sweet odors that filled the evening air from waving fans and overhanging vines of jasmine and honeysuckle; and now the negroes were scattered, and the old home left to run wild and drop into decay, and at last turned into a boarding-house! "Why did mother ever sell that one spot, of all others?" he said. "She had no need of the money."

Suddenly he stood listening. The sound of a voice, a sweet high soprano, rang out on the still air, full, clear, penetrating the wide reaches of space, as if searching the listener. Ah, the charm of that woman's voice! He lifted his head and gazed about in bewilderment. Was he there, at the old place? There was the arching gateway casting a circular shadow at his feet, the curving drive, the fountain playing as of old, the shrubbery run wild and tangled, but still there. He peered about in the moonlit darkness, and lingered while the music floated out to him through the open windows. The singer was rendering an aria, florid and difficult. He had heard it before, but here, in this place, lonely and forsaken, how incongruous! Thrilled with the outpouring of melody and rhythm, he walked nearer and nearer, drawn by the magic of the voice and the hour, and finally sat down on the edge of the basin of the old fountain.

The song ended, and a sound of children's voices and laughter came from the open door. Had the old times returned? But none sang thus in those

days. This must be some Northern guest. The children ran out into the moonlight. A man's voice called them to come in. "Where is the nurse? Where is Mary?" said the man. "These children ought to be in bed." They ran in again, and Marshall felt as if being shut out from his own home as the door closed after them. He rose to go, but again the voice of the singer filled the air, and he sat down, with his head between his hands, and listened. A merry little English ballad, and a cradle-song, dulcet and mellow! Marguerite sang them, but not in this way. Not like any instrument were the tones, — only a woman's voice, incomparably sweet and tender. Song followed song. Twice more he rose, and twice remained. "To-morrow I will find out about her," he said. At last the voice was still. The lights disappeared one by one from the windows. He hurried away, but the voice remained with him. All night long it haunted his slumbers.

CHAPTER IV

OLD FRIENDSHIPS

JOHN MARSHALL was awakened next morning by a glare of sunlight streaming through the open window. The air was fragrant with bloom. A bird sang its ecstasies in a bush outside. He lay still and listened until, in his dreamy state, the voice of the evening mingled with the song, and the delirious bird-notes resolved themselves into arias and plaintive cradle-songs, and again a woman's voice seemed to take up the notes and warble them like a bird. Suddenly a gong was struck under his window, and with that hideous sound, the odors of sausage and vile coffee pervaded the room. He dressed hurriedly and tried to form a plan for the day's action, but every scheme seemed to turn on discovering the owner of the voice.

"I am growing fairly sentimental," he said. "She may be the mother of those children, and forty at the least." He smiled, and a crooked little mirror sent back a twisted reflection of himself with a diabolical grin.

There were few boarders at Scrapp's and the dining-room was nearly empty. During his hurried breakfast his loquacious landlady regaled him with an account of a murder, news of which reached her through the posse who had breakfasted there early that morning.

"Do' know what ever is goin' to become of this place," she said. "Thievin', moonshinin', murderin' killin' lot they be. I'm sure I wisht I was back in Ohio myself, where folks know how to live decent. There's that old Toplin woman up the mountain, she's been murdered, they tell me, found her in the branch where she done her washin' with her throat cut 'nd her clo'es torn half off'n her, 'nd every single thing in the cabin smashed to pieces, 'nd they 'low it's the nigger 't worked for the old man 't's done it, fer they found his striped jail clo'es in the corner o' the cabin, 'nd the old man's clo'es gone."

"Where is the old man?"

"He's in the penitentiary servin' out a term for moonshinin', 'nd the nigger was took up when he was, but they tell me the nigger's got out, so they're after him fer the killin', 'nd when they git him they'll hang him, sure."

Marshall hastened out into the bracing morning air. Although early, there was considerable stir in the little place. Men were gathered in front of Budd's saloon talking in low tones, and another group lounged in the post-office. He glanced about, and seeing the barber's pole near by, and also the sign "I. M. Monk, Attorney at Law," a few steps farther, he turned his steps in that direction, avoiding both groups of loungers. Monk had heard of his arrival and was expecting him. He sat at his desk, his hat drawn down to his eyebrows, a pen over his ear, a toothpick between his teeth, and a pile of papers before him. He rose instantly, as Marshall entered, extending a bony hand. The lower part of his face smiled broadly, while his eyes

scrutinized his visitor from under his hat rim. He was bland and alert.

"Ah, Mr. Marshall, glad to see you, glad to see you indeed. This is a surprise. A little cool this morning. Come over by the fire. I must have a fire. I have a fire right up to midsummer. Can't stand the cold here in the mountains."

He placed a chair for Marshall near a rusty little cracked stove in which a feeble fire was burning, and seating himself still nearer, with his elbows on his knees, he stretched his wiry hands toward the heat, alternately opening and shutting his fingers as if he were grasping at something.

John felt in no mood for elaboration, and hurried through his interview with the agent with what seemed to that individual scant ceremony in his dismissal, and set off to look up some of the old neighbors whom he used to like in his boyhood. Chief among them was the family of old Colonel Wells. Andy's words of the evening before, "Missy Cunnel mos' daid tu," came back to him. "I will go to them first," he said, rubbing his chin. It was rough, and returning to Scrapp's he gathered up his shaving-tools and proceeded to the sign of the striped pole. Chas was busy. A young surveyor from Asheville was in the chair who rolled his eyes abnormally to get a look at the new-comer without moving his head. John walked to the window and looked out on the street. He saw Patterson and another man ride over the brow of the hill and gallop rapidly down the street, stopping in front of Hackett's store. The proprietor came out and the three men held an animated conversation,

Patterson gesticulating violently with his long arms, and firing tobacco juice right and left. Budd joined them from his saloon, and others gathered. It was about ten in the morning and the professional loungers were all on duty. Patterson drew a revolver from his hip pocket, and Marshall shuddered. The barber touched him on the shoulder.

"Now, sah, de gen'lem's done gone, sah." He turned and recognized the speaker.

"Why, Chesterfield, is this you? Don't you know me?"

The pale yellowish face of the barber lighted with a pleasant smile. "Sho' now! I jes' reckon, sah! I done hyeah'd yo' come home 'gin."

"You are a fine strapping fellow too. All set up in business here?"

"Yas, sah, I's fixed right smaht, I reckon. Dis heah is mighty fine razor, sah. Is yo' gwine bide 'long o' we-uns? Dis place lookin' up a heap in de las' yeah. Heap o' gen'lems draps in now long back."

Marshall inquired after the hands on the old place, learned of the whereabouts of Mammy Clarissa and Josephus, and having set Lord Chesterfield's tongue wagging, the shaving began. Chas was an expert at his trade and deft. He had not hung about the place, as did most of the negroes after being set free, but with more than their usual enterprise had worked his way to Raleigh, and there learned the tonsorial art. Although a great dandy, he was of an acquisitive nature and had soon saved up enough to set up his own pole in Patterson with the modest announcement, "Tonsorial Parlor. L. C.

Marshall, Artist and Proprietor." The male inhabitants used the gay pole as a mark for well-aimed shots of tobacco juice, and the first few months of the "artist" in his parlor were a dismal failure; but he continued to strut among the colored population as "cock o' the walk," and relished the distinction of being the only travelled and well-informed specimen of their race too well to be easily dismayed. His well-saved earnings, being spent only on himself, lasted, eked out by the occasional patronage of strangers, and he lived well and dressed smartly. Beside his trade he had acquired the accomplishments of reading and writing after a fashion, and he loved to sit in his window in plain sight from the street, as he perused the columns of the "Asheville Courier."

A few arrivals on the morning train were driven off in the equipage belonging to the new boarding-house. Old Alexander, with a revival of former dignity, looked neither to the right nor left, yet contrived to keep an eye on the bronze urchins who clustered round the carriage, cracking his whip at their bare brown legs, "tu larn 'em day mannahs," if they ventured too near. Marshall, emerging from the tonsorial parlors, saw him drive off, and recognized the grave, withered little face with a certain pleasure. He resolved to visit the old home, even if it cost him a few pangs, for the sake of this faithful old man. He thought of the singer of the evening before, and his resolve was strengthened.

The crowd had now collected in Budd's saloon. Marshall heard loud voices as he passed, and caught a little of the talk. One man, perched on the coun-

ter, taller, lanker, and if possible yellower than the rest, appeared to be giving a detailed account of the last evening's search.

"He 's layin' low som'ers hyarabouts, an' th' varmints are givin' 'im victuals," he said. "His maw 'lowed 't she never knowed 't he was out o' jail. Said 't she seed a white man round thar in jail clo'es. Laws! They 'll lie faster 'n a hoss kin run."

"Yas, they is tu many niggahs alive."

John passed on. It was warm, and he mopped his forehead with his handkerchief, and removed his coat. "I'll have a saddle horse if there 's one left in the country," he said. Men, horses, even the very dogs, seemed to have undergone a deteriorating change, as well as the younger growth of the negro population. He wondered if there were any ladies left in the land.

Miss Katherine was in her garden among the lilacs. A sturdy little negro girl trudged after her, carrying a waterpot full of water. She spoke to the child in a gentle drawl that was musical and sweet, —

"Gertrude, stop slopping watah ev'y step yue take. Yue ah making the path right muddy."

Had Miss Katherine possessed the means, her home would have been filled with works of art, and every object which refinement and exquisite good taste would suggest. As it was, having no other outlet for her passionate love for the beautiful, her sweet soul gave itself to the cultivation of flowers with a devotion that was pathetic, — her flowers and her blind old mother. With barely means for their daily necessities, and no hope to shed brightness

over her future, she awaited the yearly resurrection of her flowers with intense delight, as each unfolded itself, a new creation, with the advancing season.

"Here, Gertrude, mind now, yue due step all ovah. Watah those Sweet Williams I set out last evening. They ah hanging down like they wanted tue be back in their old bed. This ribbon grass is growing ovah the bo'dah. I promised Miz Chaplain some. Yue take it tue her aftah lunch, and mind, Gertrude, due yue heah?"

"Yas, 'm."

"Yue hand me the trowel. Ask Miz Chaplain tue come ovah tue lunch to-morrow. Ma gets so lonesome. But there, yue 'l fohget, yue need n't ask her anything, I 'll write a note. There 's ma's bell, put down the watahpot and run. Run, child, yue ah so slow. Don't step all ovah the bo'dahs."

The path from the grass-grown roadway was long and winding. John caught sight of Miss Katherine's slight, black-robed figure among the bushes, and walked rapidly toward her. The lilac blooms nodded as he brushed past, and the slender leaves of the corn lilies rustled, but she, buried in her vast black bonnet, stooped over the ribbon grass, unaware of his approach until the gate, swinging slowly back, clicked behind him. She rose quickly, and regarded him a moment with a bewildered look on her thin, fine face, while she brushed the dust mechanically from her slender hands and her dress.

John smiled down upon her with head uncovered. She looked so frail. Was this Miss Katherine or her wraith? A moment they faced each other thus,

then the light of recognition dawned in her face, and she took a quick step forward.

"Due I really see John Mahshall?" she said.

"Yes, Miss Katherine." He took both her hands, looked in her eyes, and then with a boyish impulse of reverence and affection, pushed back the ugly bonnet and kissed her on the cheek. Although twenty years his senior, a faint flush crept over her face. "I wanted to make sure it is really you and not your ghost," he said.

"Yue ah the very same boy, if yue ah grown so tall and grand like yuah fathah. Where have yue come from?" She led him to a seat under a branching chestnut. He remembered the seat and the tree. Her heart gave a little flutter, and she felt faint as the past rushed before her in a flood of painful recollections. She removed the obnoxious sunbonnet, and dropped her hands in her lap. "Donald is gone," she said.

"I know," he said, and was silent. They did not look at each other for a few minutes, and two large tears left her brown eyes and dropped on her folded hands. She wiped them away, and two more followed. John shifted his position uneasily. Had she been his own little older sister, or his little "Aunt Katherine," as he had called her when he and Donald were boys, he could have taken her in his arms and kissed them away. The wholesome impulse to give comfort possessed him, but how could he? He took one of her slight, worn hands between his own and stroked it gently. Ah! when he saw her last those hands were soft and white, and almost plump. They had rested in his curls, and

touched his boyish cheek. She was a lady then. What was she now? Toil had hardened her hands, sorrow had aged her face, and Donald — Donald was gone, — the only boy friend he had ever had.

"Yes, Miss Katherine, I know. The merry heart of life has gone out, gone with Donald and the rest of the brave fellows, and you are here alone with your mother."

"Ma is blind."

"Yes, I know that too. But things are going to change. New life will come in. There is a little stir already."

"Dick and Angeline come home every summer. Ma looks forward to that the whole year through, but Dick can't stay long when he does come; his practice is large. They ah in Richmond. He neva' has married, neitha' has Angeline. She is a right good housekeeper."

Miss Katherine's speech was slow. Her sweet voice lingered over the long vowels and treated the *r*'s with true Bostonian slight.

"I always liked Dick, but Donald was my hero," said John.

"Almost every one yue used tue know is gone. Oh, some of the old folks ah left, like ma and me, and Mr. and Miz Chaplain, but their boys ah moved tue Pine Gap. A few of the old fine families ah in Asheville duing something foh a living, and some ah clean died out o' killed off, and theih fine places sold o' run tue waste. The fine horses were rode into the ahmy, or taken by the Unions, none were left foh the growing up boys tue due with o'

handle, they were obliged tue leave the country tue live. The old folks that stay on like we due, barely live on what they can get the niggahs tue raise. The niggahs ah good foh nothing, — the young ones, — and the old ones ah feeble now. Have yue been tue the old place yet?"

"I only walked past it after sundown. They seemed to be having a good time. Some one was singing — a lady." He placed Miss Katherine's hand back in her lap, and rising paced the path in front of the seat. "Yes, evidently a lady," he said. "Have you met them, the present owners?"

"I didn't go foh a right good while, then Dick sent one of his patients there, and wrote me tue call on her, and I did." She paused, watching the young man restlessly striding up and down. "I due wish ma could see yue," she said at length. "Yue ah the very image of yuah fatha' and yue ah right handsome tue."

John laughed. He sat beside her again and took her hand as before. "You look at me with different eyes from most people," he said. "You know how I loved Captain Donald, and you let a little of your feeling for him color your thoughts of me; but although I don't deserve it, I like it, Miss Katherine. I wish —" He hesitated.

"Where ah yue stopping?" she asked.

"At Scrapp's."

"Oh, John! That horrible place! Come here and stop. We-all can't due foh yue like we used tue, but ouh doahs ah never closed tue old friends."

"Will you let me come as you would Dick or Donald, were he here now? Will you let me pay

my way and be no burden to you?" he asked eagerly.

She drew away the hand he had taken, and a shadow crept over her face in a crimson flush. "I neva' meant so," she said. "We neva' have kept bo'dahs, ma and I. We neva' could due that."

"Why, no, of course!" he exclaimed instantly. "I only meant —" He hesitated. "I can make it right some other way," he thought. "But there! It is like you to take pity on me in that way. I need it too. It is a confoundedly dismal place there."

Miss Katherine rose, and stood before him, slight and straight, her head lifted like a queen. "Yue ah General Mahshall's son," she said. "Youa rightful place is with youa fatha's old friends. Ouh grandfatha's came tue No'th Carolina from Virginia togetha' and bought their plantations joining, and lived and died as friends. Ouh fatha's fought in the same ahmy, and died on the same day, and were always like brothahs, and youa rightful place is heah. Yue bring youa boxes this evening, and Donald's old room is youas. Come in now and see ma."

John's eyes glistened. He felt like kissing her again. "I will do what you say," he replied, following her to the house. "I will obey you as I used when a boy. I believe you were the only being I ever did mind implicitly in those days." They both laughed.

"Yue and Donald did have right good times," she said.

Her mother sat in a large cushioned chair by an open window, where the honeysuckle and matrimony vines floated in, with her hands folded in her lap, and her eyes closed.

"Ma is asleep," said Miss Katherine, softly.

"No," said the old lady, sitting erect. "Who is with you, Katherine?" Her eyes were turned toward them. John never would have thought her blind but for a turn of the head as if she were listening rather than seeing.

John came close to her chair. "It is the boy who used to come to your house with Donald and turn everything topsy-turvy, who wore your wedding-dress in a pantomime, who used to play ghost at midnight to frighten the negroes; the boy who used to drop in on you at five in the morning from a coon hunt, draggled and tired and hungrier than the coon himself, because he did not want to go home and be reprimanded by his mother. Have you still a warm place for him in your heart?"

She rose, trembling a little. "I know the voice," she said, "but it is not the boy's voice, it is the voice of his father."

"It is John Mahshall, ma," said Miss Katherine.

"It is the general," said the old lady.

John took one soft hand in his, and she passed the other lightly over his face and through his hair, then sank back in her great-chair and covered her face with her hands.

Katherine placed a chair for their guest. "Why, ma," she said, "ar'n't yue going tue give John a welcome?"

Clever Katherine! She knew how to keep her charge from sad thoughts, by rousing her to her duties as hostess. These duties, with loving tact, she had never usurped. She would manage the house, would labor, contrive, and save, but it was the mother who received and entertained, and led in conversation. The delight of being herself the hostess, so dear to woman's heart, was never taken from her. Now she put aside the recollections that overwhelmed her, and spoke again.

"For your own sake, John, for your father's and Donald's, you are thrice welcome. Are you near?" She touched the arm of his chair. "It is useless to mourn, or wish to see you. It is a pleasure to hear your voice, and if you resemble your father as much in your appearance, it is as if I saw you."

Her tongue was not so strongly tinctured with dialect as was her daughter's.

"Do you remember father so well?"

"As if I saw him an hour ago. You must be like him, though your hair curls closer and thicker. Are your eyes blue?"

John laughed and turned to Katherine. "They are party-colored; one is blue and the other half brown," he said.

"Oh, I had forgotten that, but it is not so noticeable now," said Katherine.

"I had not," said her mother.

With a quiet smile of understanding with Marshall, Katherine left the room. She went to look after the lunch. Her mother heard the latch click. "Katherine," she called.

"Yes, ma."

"Give John Donald's old room, daughter."

"Yes, ma."

"And, Katherine," her mother lifted her voice a little, but she was gone.

"Shall I call her back?" asked John.

"No, she never makes a mistake. Now," she turned her sightless eyes on him as if she would look him through, — "Now, John, tell me about yourself. Is your mother living?"

"Indeed yes, and a lively little mother she is. She does n't grow old. She flies back and forth between New Orleans and New York, — always takes Marguerite with her. She loves society, the theatre, and gay times as well as Marguerite does. During the severest weather she goes to Cuba, and protests she loves Cuba best of all."

"No, she will never grow old until she drops into the grave," said the blind woman, placidly. "Yet she is older than I. Who is Marguerite?"

"She is mother's ward. Mother is the only one living who is any kin to her, except me of course, in a very distant way. She is an heiress."

"Tell me about her."

"Mother loves her dearly."

"Ah, but tell me about her," persisted his old friend. "What is Marguerite like?"

"Like?" he laughed. "I really wonder what she is like! She is called beautiful, — artists say so. I don't care for that dark style. She is not tall, but she is a shapely little thing, and she has dimples and pretty little perfect teeth. Her eyes would be called black if they were not so large. Oh, I can't describe her. She is, frankly,

the most fascinating little piece you ever looked at, though."

His companion laughed. "I think I can help you," she said. "She has a little flush in her cheeks, and her mouth is full and inclined to pout, but beautiful, nevertheless."

"Oh, yes, of course she is beautiful, she must be."

"And her hair is luxuriant, and curling, and black as night."

"Not curling, straight as an Indian's; but she dresses it charmingly."

"She is not as beautiful as her mother, I judge."

"You knew her mother? But of course you must have known mother's friends. I have lived so apart from her that they are mostly strangers to me."

"Ah, yes." The old lady's face brightened; she was living again some of the scenes of her young womanhood. "She was the loveliest woman I ever saw, — a little Cuban of very aristocratic family. She spoke little English, and talked with your mother in Spanish. A young Scotchman, a friend of your father's who used to visit at our house, fell in love with her, poor fellow, and wooed her persistently with his great blue eyes. I shall never forget their love-making. He tried to learn Spanish, and she spoke to him in the prettiest bad English. They were married at your father's house, and he took her to Scotland, but the climate there was too severe for her, and he carried her back to Cuba, bringing her here every summer. But he could n't keep her. She died, leaving him only the little Marguerite and a broken heart. I have held her

baby in my arms many a time, but she can't be as beautiful as her mother."

"Marguerite has been sadly spoiled," said John, at length. "She was educated in a convent until she was seventeen, and since that time mother has petted and indulged her atrociously. You must tell me about my father, Mrs. Wells. I know too little of him. He was such a busy, absorbed man, as I remember him."

"A busy man, year in and year out. He was for waiting and maintaining peace, but when the war really came he was one of the first at the front, strong for our Southern principles, stanch and true. A more gallant soldier never wore our uniform."

"And I left home before that, and never saw father again. Why did he send me to Uncle Darius, I wonder? I might have entered the army with him. Many a boy went at fifteen, and I was well grown. Mother never was pleased that I was sent from home."

"Your father did what he thought best for you. The war did n't break out until a year later, but he had begun to fear it, and spent that whole year in Washington. He hoped it might be averted. He spent a day with us just before his last battle. I heard him say to the colonel, — my colonel was at home with a wound — " She paused a moment, and then resumed: "I heard him say, 'My boy is safe, thank God, and in good hands. If I never come out from our next engagement, there will be no more need of me in the world. We are certainly leading a forlorn hope.' He was sad that day. Two weeks

later he lay on the field, shot through the heart. The colonel died on the same day, but that was different. He died in his bed, with Katherine and me by his side. Your father had no one; but then —" She was silent again. John went to the window, and pulling a sprig of honeysuckle tore it to bits. "No," she continued, "your father knew best. War is terrible. God save us from it forever. You would have been an added burden, and he had enough. We could scarcely feed our troops, let alone clothe them."

Katherine came in with a pretty flush in her cheeks. "Come tue luncheon," she said cheerily. "Ma, bring John out, please. Gertrude, step spry now; yue ah so slow, child."

Marshall lingered after lunch, chatting with the two lonely women, and then left promising to return in the evening.

"Gabe shall go tue Scrapp's foh youa boxes," said Katherine. "He's a no 'count niggah, like all the young lot, but we keep him foh his ma's sake. She takes on so when we make out tue discha'ge him."

CHAPTER V

THE NEW BOARDING-HOUSE

PORTIA VAN OSTADE stood in her mother's room arranging her tumbled hair. Her hat was thrown carelessly aside and her cheeks glowed with exercise, but she seemed excited and nervous.

"Portia, you are overworking, I see it," said her mother, anxiously. "Lie down on my bed, child."

Portia gathered her long hair deftly in one hand and drew it to the crown of her shapely little head. "No, mamma deary, I am just frightened a bit, that 's all. Now don't worry. I 'll tell you about it. I took those napkins to old Clarissa to mend — and, by the way, don't let me forget to tell you what happened while I was there; I will tell this first — and coming home I went down under that old bridge by the mill for ferns to decorate the dining-room with this evening. You remember there are great shelving rocks piled up on one side; well, all at once my heart gave a thump, right in my throat, and I felt such a queer creeping sensation all over me, as if some awful thing were near; and I looked up, and right above me, crouching in a kind of cleft of those rocks, was the wildest, wickedest looking creature I ever saw, peering down at me. He was a negro, and he held a stone as large as my head, as if he were going to

hurl it at me. I could n't scream, I just stood still and looked into his terrible bloodshot eyes, and he looked at me. Everything was so still, as if there were no one in the world to help me. I dared not move, lest that should break the spell and he would throw; but he must have been listening, for there came a clatter of hoofs over the bridge, and he disappeared into the gray rocks as if he were part of them. Then how I screamed! Then Josephus, who did the teaming for us, looked over the bridge, and called, 'Hi, Miss Po'tia, dat yo' done hollah?' It all happened in a moment, but it seemed an age of agony. Even when he called I could n't speak. He came down and took me in his arms, and carried me bodily up that steep path and set me on the bridge, and then went back for my ferns — good-hearted fellow! — I have them in water, a great tubful. He left his mule at the mill and came all the way home with me. He has gone back for it now, and will ride into Patterson and tell the sheriff. He said, 'Dat Pete Gunn, sho', wha' done kill de ol' woman up de mountain.'"

"Now, Portia, this is wrong. Do you never go alone again in this awful country, where murders are committed in broad daylight."

"Oh, that was away off in a lone place in the mountain, mamma."

"It was done, Portia, and you must take some one with you when you wish to go off on your tramps."

"Very well, I will invite one of the boarders. Usually some would like to go, — or I can take Lucyleese."

"Lucyleese! That child would be of no service in the world. You should take Alexander."

"She has a screech that would scare the breath out of a — a — 'squinch owel,' as she calls it, and then she is great fun; only I do love to be alone sometimes these busy days."

"Then you must lock yourself in your room, where you will be safe."

Portia laughed merrily. "Go off and have the sulks like a baby," she said. "But don't be troubled; I promise not to do this again." She patted and poked the fluffy mass of hair rolling up from her forehead, scrutinized the newly adjusted coiffure in the mirror, turning her head this way and that like a bird preparing to sing, then dropped at Mrs. Van Ostade's feet, and laid her head, careless of consequences, in her mother's lap.

The invalid stroked delicately her daughter's forehead and cheek and full white throat.

"Oh, mamma, your magic hand! It brushes my nervousness away. I am sure he would have killed me if Josephus had not come; but now I am going to tell you something pleasanter, only a little sad too. Old Clarissa was showing me her keepsakes, which she had so carefully put away, that she said her 'young mars'r had given her befo' he went No'f to lib wid he's paw's twin brudder,' when a nice young man came to the door and stood a moment, and then walked in, and seeing me stopped again. She looked at him, and you know she is lame and slow, but all at once her face lighted up with an expression — well, such as she might wear in heaven, and she hobbled a step forward,

and then dropped her cane and held out both arms toward him and fell. She had fainted. In trying to catch her we both sprang forward into each other's arms in a way that would have been funny but for our anxiety."

"You always see funny things at the most appalling times."

"I know. It 's dreadful. 'The step from the sublime to the ridiculous' is one of the figures in my dance of life. Is that the Dutch in me? Was papa like that?"

"Yes, very like. But go on."

"Where 's grandfather?" Portia started up with a frightened look.

"He is with Mrs. Percy and the children, and Alexander is driving. You are all unstrung, child."

"No, mamma; but the same thing might happen to him, only worse."

"You must neither of you go about alone, or any one."

"When that murderer is taken, it will be all right. There is no more peaceful place."

"Go on, dear, don't leave Clarissa on the floor any longer."

"He took her up as tenderly as if she were his mother, and would have laid her on the bed she is so proud of, but that would have broken her heart; so I had him place her in her large chair, and he tipped it back while I brought water and bathed her head.

"'She used to be my mammy when I was a child,' he said; and then I knew who he was, and told him where I lived, and when she was herself

again I left. Poor old woman! her look into his face was pathetic. 'I done waited fo' yo' home-comin' mighty long time, honey, an' now I done los' yo', sho',' she said. 'Yo' look dat like yo' paw, w'en he young man an' come an' paid de money fo' me an' tuk me home dat time, like he done come back he's own se'f I declar'; hit nerved me so, hit tuk my strenk cl'ar 'way.' Oh, mamma, what an awful thing slavery must have been! Do you suppose he saw it as I did?"

"I assume not. The values of life are all changed, sometimes, by education."

"I wonder if his ideas would be more like ours, being educated for the most part in the North," said Portia, dreamily. "I wonder —" She stopped.

"What are you wondering, daughter?"

"I was only thinking. I often wonder about those who lived here then. If his mother is living, what would she think if she should come and find her old home turned into a boarding-house and kept by Northerners? She used to perfectly hate us, of course."

"She might think us low-bred, and treat us accordingly."

"Dear little mother," said Portia, laughing, and kissing her.

As Portia entered the huge old dining-room with her guests that evening, she looked with a shudder at the ferns she had arranged so charmingly, but she told no one of her adventure, and showed no trace of agitation save in her heightened color. Her few guests were all pleasant and congenial. Thus far her venture had not been disagreeable.

Mr. Ridgeway remarked on the chill in the room, owing to the brick floor. "I believe these bricks gather dampness," he said.

"Won't you light the fire, grandfather?" said Portia. Materials for one were laid in the great fireplace, built of red brick like the floor. "It is pleasanter, and mamma is coming down."

Mrs. Van Ostade's chair and cushion were placed at the table nearest the fire, where Portia sat at the head. Mr. Ridgeway took the head of the other table, while Portia poured the tea for both. With Portia were Mr. and Mrs. Percy and the children, and a much travelled, silky-haired artist from New York; a middle-aged woman of means, from Chicago, and her daughter, also middle-aged; an elderly gentleman of wealth, whose gallant and open admiration for Portia embarrassed her and amused the rest; and a merry little Englishman travelling for pleasure. It was surmised, in confidential aside to the elderly gentleman by the lady from Chicago, that he was really looking up some fabulous mine for some equally fabulous and monstrous London syndicate.

At Mr. Ridgeway's table were two young men with work-stained hands and ruddy, open countenances. They were starting a peach plantation on a mountain-side. Enterprising and strong, they carried an air of good cheer which was not lost on the sensitive nerves of their host. With them were seated Mrs. Barry and her four-year-old daughter and a nurse, and gentle, elderly Miss Milbourn, who wore a lace cap and had a sweet matronly air, and her younger friend, Mrs. Clare, who had come

to the wilds of North Carolina to battle alone with an inherent taint of consumption. These and a serving-maid constituted the *dramatis personæ* of the dining-room.

Mrs. Barry was of German descent, with large bright eyes and luxuriant dark hair, worn low on her shapely head, in a heavy, loose coil. Her clear, ringing voice was loud, but not unpleasant. As she settled herself voluminously at table, she snatched up three letters addressed in the same hand, and waving them triumphantly over her head, cried: "Ha, ha! What did I say? Three! Some awkward delay in the mails has brought these all at once, but I knew they would come. He always writes every day. Was there ever a husband like mine?"

"One," said little Mrs. Clare, timidly, displaying a bulging envelope addressed in a heavy square hand to Mrs. La Mott Clare.

"Only yours puts several letters in one," said Miss Milbourn, gently.

"Ah, but that is not like being thought of every single day, you know," said Mrs. Barry, contentedly turning her attention to the large slice of roast before her.

"Portia, where did you find these lovely ferns?" said Mrs. Percy.

"Think of it," said Mrs. Keller, the middle-aged lady from Chicago. "Such large growths at this season!"

"Think of it," said the middle-aged-looking daughter, who always echoed her mother, "and at this season too! Why, the snow is hardly off the ground with us."

"I found them under the bridge by that tumble-down gristmill where the negroes take their corn," said Portia.

"I have it in one of my sketches," said the artist.

"Oh, the one you showed me yesterday," said Mrs. Barry.

"No. That is a sawmill, and has an undershot wheel, not nearly so picturesque."

"Yes," said Portia, "the overshot wheel is better to sketch. It 's clumsier and more primitive."

"But when it comes to business, it 's a pretty slow affair," said one of the enterprising young men. "Ever see the miller?"

"Yes," said Portia.

"He 's a queer chap, — slow as his mill."

"He keeps something there beside corn meal," said the other young man, with a laugh.

"Ah," said the elderly gentleman, smiling, "you have means of knowing?"

"I tracked a few old codgers there and made a discovery. He 's in with these mountain fellows. He 's a sharp one, — innocent as a baby."

"Richard has mistaken his calling," exclaimed his partner. "Raising peaches on a mountain has n't enough variety in it to suit him."

"What! Are there real moonshiners here?" cried Mrs. Barry.

"And w'at might they be, — moonshiners?" inquired the Englishman, Mr. Betts.

"Illicit distillers," replied Mr. Ridgeway. "Some of these mountaineers make corn whiskey, and smuggle it on the market without paying government tax on it."

"Ah, I see. So they do that here. It certainly is interesting to know."

"You must not give Mr. Betts such information, grandfather," said Portia. "He may write a geography for little English children, and tell them the principal industry of the mountainous regions of the United States is illicit distilling of whiskey."

"Oh, now, you are rather 'ard on me, you know, I must say."

"No, Mr. Betts' book will be on geology," said Mrs. Keller. "You should have seen him unload the stones from his pocket this afternoon."

"You should have seen him," echoed her daughter.

"Do you find any ore, Mr. Betts?" queried the artist.

"Not to speak of I 'ave n't, but they tell me this is the oldest rock formation in the world, you know, and it is interesting to trace the history of the place in the stones. And they do tell me fossils 'ave been found here, w'ich is strange, very strange, you know, and I find a curious mixture of vitreous and volcanic rock, plainly volcanic, together with stratified rock of a water formation, and limestone character, you know. Now, 'ow came these all to be so thrown together, so far inland?"

"Ah, you must answer that, Mr. Betts; we certainly can't, not I at least," said the elderly gentleman.

"Your question will hardly be answered for a generation to come, I fear," said Mr. Ridgeway. "This region affords an interesting field for naturalists, I think."

"It is as full of poetry as it is of scientific interest," said the artist. "We who look on the externals of things find nature glorious here."

"I think," said Portia, refilling the artist's cup with tea, "the hardest things to reconcile with each other are just simple, plain facts. The scientists are continually stating facts, and then overturning them with other facts, and then finding still others that clash with these, and all seems out of tune, and still the turmoil goes on, and there is no end."

"You are right, Miss Van Ostade," said the artist. "Your profession and mine are, after all, the only ones that search out the harmonies. The realm of Music and the domain of Art, they are really one."

"But mine is often out of tune, though," said she.

"Not when you are its exponent, Miss Van Ostade, never," said the elderly gentleman.

Portia shook her head, laughing. Mrs. Keller exchanged glances with her daughter. Mr. and Mrs. Percy were privately discussing the undesirability of allowing the children the full bill of fare, and lost this bit of table talk. The old maid looked up and spoke in her quiet voice.

"I think herein lies an evidence of the Omnipotent mind, overruling and controlling, bringing harmony out of these stubborn facts; so that Mr. Held exclaims, 'This region is poetic, and nature is glorious,' and Miss Van Ostade can order the sometimes discordant waves of sound into such perfection of harmony and melody that we delight

in it. Harmony and beauty are part of the facts, or we should never find them."

Mrs. Percy's face lighted up. "Miss Milbourn touches the keynote of the universe," said Mr. Ridgeway.

"And where there is a keynote there may be harmony," said she.

Poor Johnny Percy, who had been denied his dessert and had only a few nuts in his chubby fist to crack at his leisure, yawned audibly. Miss Milbourn laughed.

"Why, Johnny!" said his mother.

"'Ard nuts to crack, aren't they, little man?" said Mr. Betts.

"Naw. I can do it; take a stone," said the imperturbable youngster, gravely wondering where the laugh came in.

"That's what I've been trying to crack them with, and failed," said the Englishman, slapping his knees heartily.

"That's right, sonny, stick to nuts you can crack and you'll get on," said his father.

"But don't use your teeth, child," said his mother, as he set a filbert between his sturdy little jaws.

A clang sounded from the great brass knocker at the front door as they rose from the table, — an unusual event of an evening. The neighbors, in their kindly Southern way, had begun to show the family some attention; but as the neighbors were far between, their visits were generally in the afternoon.

"I wonder if Miss Van Ostade is to have a caller this evening," said Mrs. Keller in an aside to her

daughter, as she shook out her heavy silken skirts. The trim waiting-maid was handing her mistress a card.

They all swept out of the dining-room, up the broad stair, into the long, dimly lighted hall. Mr. Betts pranced at the head, with little Juliet on his shoulder, followed by the screaming children, and Mr. Ridgeway, with his daughter on his arm, brought up the rear. A blazing fire of logs and pine branches in a huge red brick fireplace filling one end of the great old-fashioned drawing-room, threw ruddy, quivering light over cracked walls, and plain, comfortable, modern furniture. Mrs. Clare seated herself at the piano and played a lively galop. That and the dancing firelight wrought a contagion of merriment, and in a moment the party, old and young, were flying over the smooth walnut-colored floor in time to the music, while peals of hilarious laughter from the children re-echoed through the vast empty halls. Portia entered a small, firelit room opening from the other side of the hall, used by the guests as a reading-room. Here she found John Marshall awaiting her.

"I have hastened to accept your invitation to call," he said.

"Ah, how good of you!" She hesitated, flushing slightly. Why had she said "how good"? she thought; "he will mistake my meaning." She hastened to explain. "Of course, everything is so changed, I feared — I thought — even if it might be painful to you, you might like to see the old place again."

"Please don't think it is the place only I come to see. After our odd meeting this afternoon it is yourself." He also spoke a bit nervously, and not as he had intended, and hastened to add: "I wanted to thank you for your kindness to old Clarissa. She was one of the few faithful servants in the past."

"She certainly is loyal to your family. When did you return to Patterson, Mr. Marshall?"

He laughed. "Return to Patterson? I protest. I have returned to the soil on which it stands, and to these grand old hills. There was no Patterson in my day here." Portia sat gravely looking into the fire, and he watched her face a moment as the light played over it with rosy tint, and resumed: "I arrived at dusk last evening, and to-day have been roaming about seeking old friends. It is as you say, yet everything is not changed; the everlasting hills are unchangeable. I had forgotten how beautiful they are, if I ever knew. Boys don't think deeply on the beauties of nature, you know."

Portia's face lighted with a smile. She looked up, and their eyes met. "Perhaps you are one of those happy natures who never look wholly on the dark side," she said. "But, speaking of changes, I was thinking only of this particular place, — your old home." The smile faded as she spoke, and she looked gravely into the fire again. John was charmed with her every movement, but in his heart he vaguely wondered who the singer of the evening before might be.

"Then I shall disappoint you," he said. "I am very prosaic, or — what shall I call it? — lacking

in sentiment toward this old place. There were others, one in particular, — I visited it this morning, — which I used to love more than this. It is very shocking, I know, and shows a hardened and villanous nature, but true it is. You must respect my candor, if not my heart, when I tell you that I came here this evening with a feeling of expectation and pleasure in the — pardon me, I won't tell all my thoughts, but among them was no regret. As I walked up the drive, I thought only in a vague way of the changes, as that this was gone, or that grown past recognition, and since you have set the fountain playing, the sound of dropping water is as sweet as when I used to sit on its edge with a row of mischievous piccaninnies and stir up the gold fish. It is a pleasure to find the house occupied and serving some useful purpose, instead of falling farther into decay."

Portia burst into a merry laugh.

"Now, Miss Van Ostade, that is not fair. I was willing you should be shocked, but to laugh — "

"Indeed, I am only laughing at myself. The light of your good sound sense shows me what a sentimental creature I have been, — like a boarding-school novel girl. Now you have confessed, I will do the same, and you may laugh at me. Ever since our unaccountable encounter this afternoon I have been filled with misgiving. I have dreaded your coming, thinking you would be so pained to find your old home turned into — of all things — a boarding-house, that you would detest us. I tried to contrast its past beauty with its present state of partly resuscitated decay, and to

imagine your sadness as you would walk up the drive, once so well kept, feeling that it is yours no longer, and that you are in a sense shut out and a stranger; and then I imagined you taking note of all the signs of past neglect and general dilapidation, until I was positively sad myself, and distraught all through dinner, and was half embarrassed by my own thoughts when I found you were actually here and I must face you, and now — "

"And now to discover how unpoetic I am, with no natural feelings? What a revulsion!"

"Please don't mistake me. I could n't help laughing at myself for constructing an unreal situation, and distressing myself as if it were real, before knowing anything about the facts. I wonder, do we ever judge our fellow creatures at all justly, or only judge our own unreal fancies about them, which we set up and call our fellow creatures?"

"Only a few could do that, Miss Van Ostade. Most of us common mortals must take things as we find them, without the power of adding thereto. What is beautiful we sometimes lose sight of, seldom that which is not." The sound of laughter, subdued by distance and closed doors, came to him as he spoke, and he rose to go. "I am keeping you from other guests," he said. He had not accomplished his wish. Who was the singer of the night before? Might it be the hostess herself? "If she only had that voice!" he thought. "I have disgraced myself, I know, but may I come again? I will think up, in the mean time, reasons for a becoming degree of melancholy, and so prove

to you that I have at least enough sentiment to connect me with the rest of the human family."

"Now it is you who are laughing at me. Do not go. Coffee is being served; won't you stay, and allow me to introduce you to my guests? — unless you detest Northerners," she added with a quick glance, which he returned in kind.

"Detest? I adore them."

"Then I can't allow you to go until you have accepted hospitality here at least. Please!" — She led the way into the drawing-room. A shout of delight greeted them as she opened the door. It was dear little music-loving Juliet who pounced upon her thus unceremoniously.

"Oh, Miss Van Ostade! Please, please sing, Miss Van Ostade, sing."

The formal introductions over, John found himself seated in pleasant conversation with Mr. Ridgeway and his daughter. At a prettily laid tea-table in the corner near the piano, Portia poured the fragrant coffee. It was passed by the children, to whom this was an especial privilege, after which service they were promptly put to bed by the nurse-maids, unless Juliet could persuade their mammas to let them stay longer while Portia sang to them.

"After a little, deary," she said to that importunate little miss; "when I have finished here. Now you may carry this cup to Mr. Marshall, and, Johnny, you may take the biscuit. Carefully, little man, or they will slide onto the floor. Don't look at Juliet, look at your own tray."

"Donny can't carry bi'kets, he 's on'y a boy," said his little sister Helen, watching his uncer-

tain course, and envious of the honor reposed in him.

"Can too," shouted the belligerent, looking back at her, and deftly sliding the dainty wafers, plate and all, into the lap of the lady from Chicago.

"Now, now," cried the elderly gentleman, amid the burst of laughter which followed. "That is unkind, to take them all, Mrs. Keller."

"Oh, Johnny," cried his mother. "Portia, why do you trust him? And your lovely plate, too! What if it had gone on the floor?" She took the tray from the humbled boy, and began passing it herself.

"I said Donny could n't pass bi'kets," asserted Helen.

"But boys can learn as well as girls," said Portia, passing her arm around the affectionate little piece of impetuosity, who had tearfully slunk back to her chair, well knowing where to find comfort. "Helen may pass the sugar." She placed the pretty blue bowl comfortably in the chubby hands, and went on pouring the coffee and interceding for Johnny. "Please let him try once more. It won't happen again." The little fellow's face became radiant, while two tears, one on either flushed cheek, were pathetic, and the tray was placed in his hands. "Johnny is a little soldier, and this time he will pay attention only to what he is doing."

"Do you like coffee in pretty cups?" said the small maiden, Juliet, as she paused in front of Marshall.

"Indeed I do, and little girls too," he replied.

"Oh, you said a rhyme," she cried, as he took the cup.

"Now won't you sit on my knee while I drink it, and take the cup back for me?"

She demurely shook her head, eying him gravely. "I 'm not 'quainted yet," she said.

"That 's so. Then, if you 'll bring Mr. Ridgeway his, we will be acquainted when you come back, and you can sit on my knee while Miss Van Ostade sings."

She nodded assent, and danced back to Portia's side.

"Is that the way you hurry up an acquaintance with a young lady?" queried Mr. Ridgeway.

"Certainly, with very young ones."

"You and I must fight a duel, then," said Mr. Betts. "You have stolen my young lady."

Conversation was going on all over the room. Portia heard all, but kept her eyes on her cups and saucers. Marshall watched her without appearing to do so.

Mr. Ridgeway turned and spoke quietly to the young peach-planter, whom his partner had called Richard. "Have you really discovered signs of illicit business there at the mill, Mr. Dutton?"

"Signs! It 's a regular whiskey hole. It was Clark there at the station who put me on the track. He hears a word or two now and then not just intended for his ears, there at Scrapp's."

"Take my advice, then. Don't let it be known that you have such knowledge, if you wish to go

on with your planting instead of being planted yourself. I was sorry to hear you mention it even in our select circle this evening. There are slumbering elements here you would best beware of. I am sure of it."

"Guess you 're right," said the younger man, thoughtfully. He drew something from an inner pocket which Mr. Ridgeway took and looked at a moment, and then returned with a smile.

"Ah," he said slowly. "Yes, it 's dangerous business, though, Mr. Dutton."

"But it must be looked after. We never can make anything of this place with that kind of open law-breaking going on."

"No, surely not. Neither can we afford to have such young fellows as you killed off."

"Well, I may not use this. I had myself appointed because I happen to know the ropes. We may be forced to clean the whole thing out for self-protection. There is deviltry enough going on about election time without free whiskey."

The coffee disposed of, and the cups returned to the tea-table by the small carriers, Portia rose to fulfil her promise to the children. Marshall lifted the dancing Juliet to his knee.

"You were to sit here, you know, while Miss Van Ostade sings."

"I am afraid you will regret it," said Mrs. Barry. "Juliet never stops asking questions."

The child gravely regarded her mother a moment, then said, "But I am going to listen now, mamma." Then turning to Marshall, she inquired in a half whisper, "What 's your name?" He drew

the midget up to him comfortably. "John is my name. Now we are acquainted."

She nodded, and, pointing with a dimpled hand to young Master Percy, said: "His name is John, too, only we call him Johnny. He is rough sometimes. Are you rough?"

"Indeed, I hope not. Never with little children."

She looked into his face once again seriously, and then, apparently satisfied, nestled down, and folded her hands to listen, while Portia's rich voice filled the room. And John? John was satisfied. He had discovered the singer of the evening before. After a time the songs for the little ones ceased, and the children were put to bed. Conversation became general again. The guests made plans for excursions to one or two beautiful waterfalls in the vicinity, and a visit was proposed to a little log church where the negroes held services a few miles away. John was invited to make one of the party. Then Mrs. Clare and Mrs. Barry played a duet, which was followed by more songs, sometimes with obligato accompaniment from Mr. Ridgeway's violin, which he handled not strongly but with great sweetness and grace. The selections grew more difficult. Portia sang now in Italian, now in German, and at last in plain English to please Mr. Betts.

And John Marshall, passionate lover of music that he was, was satisfied.

CHAPTER VI

HOPES AND PLANS

THE moonlight covered the ground at Marshall's feet with a wonderful network of shadows. He paused in his rapid walk and stretched out his arms to the cool night air, straightened himself to his full height, drew in a deep breath, and said to himself, "At last I have found her — my girl of the bridge!" He buttoned his coat about himself as if he had her secreted in an inner pocket. "It must be she. No other could be so like my girl of the German bridge." He walked on thoughtfully. Whichever way he looked he still saw Portia's bright, proud head. "Found at last, in the dilapidated, forsaken, dishonored old home, keeping boarders, and —" he drew a letter from his pocket, turned it over in his hand, and replaced it. "What shall I do if mother and Marguerite persist in coming on?"

"Ma 's gone tue bed," said Miss Katherine, as he entered. "She nevah sits up aftah eight."

Miss Katherine had been reading by a shaded lamp. She had had Gabriel light a fire to make the room look cheerful to John, and indeed it was homelike enough after the wretched bedroom at Scrapp's. He saw around him the same furniture he and Donald used to think so grand. The great mahogany sofa, its rags now decently covered by knitted

and crocheted tidies, would have held twelve such boys. Now he settled himself comfortably in one corner of it.

"Miss Katherine, what are you reading?" he asked.

She handed him a little old leather-bound volume of Thomson's "Seasons." He turned it over in his hand, but all he saw on the title page was Portia Van Ostade.

"Miss Katherine," he said at last, "my head is full of schemes. Come over here on the sofa and let me talk to you. It will seem like old times." So she settled herself in the other corner, as he had in his, and they chatted far into the night, — of the past, and his boyhood, of the happenings during his long absence, and how all the desolation had come about, and her voice was low and sad with a slow, patient sadness as it lingered over the words. At last he broke in with the impetuosity of undaunted youth: "Miss Katherine, things will be better soon. I am come to stay, to settle up mother's affairs and look after some matters for Uncle Darius, and, for one thing, that hotel 's going to be built." He rose and paced the room.

"Yue can't. There 's a hitch somewhere. Miz Chaplain knows. She says Jud 's mad at the road, and won't sell his half of the hill."

"Yes, he will! He 'll sell to me."

"To yue!" She opened her eyes in affright.

John laughed. "You look as if I had said I would swallow him and his hill."

"Yue might as well try that as tue move Jud, oh buy a hill of pure gold."

"Well, cheer up. I won't tell you how it is to come about, but that rascally Monk is to have the wind taken out of his sails, and Jud and I will build that hotel. I have the plans with me. They are my own. He must move back here and help, that 's all. What 's he standing in his own light for? He 's the only one left of the old set that I can work with. In three weeks you 'll see a gang of men grading that hill. Then you 'll believe me." He paused and stood looking down at her whimsically. "But first I want you to promise, — no, you need not. I 'll do it, anyway."

"What will yue do, John?"

He sat beside her and took her hand. "I will, if you will let me, try to be some of the things to you that Donald would have been. You have taken me in as if you were my own sweet sister, for his sake, and as if this were my home; and now, for his sake, let me be, in a sense, brother and son in this house." Her pathetic brown eyes filled with tears, and her thin hand trembled in his. He placed it gently back in her lap. "Let me," he said; "you know what Donald would do." He settled himself again in his corner. "It 's late, I know, but may I talk a little longer, this time about myself?"

"Oh, yes, John, yes. The Lord sent you to us; the Lord sent you back."

"You know my father and Uncle Darius loved each other, if they were opposed in politics. Uncle Darius has done all for me a father could, — sent me to college, given me my choice of a profession and sent me abroad, and Aunt Mary has mothered me,

scolded, trained, and loved me, until I feel for her what I suppose, according to the ties of blood, I should give to my mother. They both came clear across the Continent to hear my oration. I worked for my life to take honors, to please them, and, on the whole, did fairly well. They stayed in New York to see me start for Europe. Mother was there too, she and Marguerite, but then —"

"Youh mothah nevah returned aftah your fathah's death."

"Mother loved society, and there was nothing here."

"Except a few of youh fathah's old friends."

"Father and mother were so unlike; if he had lived it would have been different."

"How long were you abroad, John?"

"Three years. I worked hard there, studying."

"Architecture? Were you alone?"

"Mother and Marguerite were with me off and on, but I was there for work, and they for pleasure, you know. Strange to say, I saw more of them than I ever had before. Mother seemed to grow fonder of me, too, but you know her way, the fonder she is of one, the more she wants to rule. She set her heart and soul and will, which last is the greater part of her, on my marrying Marguerite." He laughed a little. "We were engaged for a time, until Marguerite confessed she only became engaged to me because she found it expedient, and because she did n't 'dislike me exactly,' and as we were of the same mind, we quietly broke off the engagement, stopped fighting, and have gotten on fairly well since. Now here is my predicament. Mother

writes me from New York (they are both there) that she has half a mind to visit me and the old home together. Half a mind with her is equal to the whole minds of a dozen other people. They 'll come, that 's what they 'll do, and what shall I do with them?"

"I wish we —"

"They can't come here; I 'll accommodate them at Scrapp's first." Miss Katherine held up both hands in horror. "I 'd take them to the old place, only I called there this afternoon, and found them such thoroughly charming people."

"Why, John, that 's all the bettah."

"It 's all the worse. You know mother. She 'd make them feel like the dirt she walks on. She 'd set her heel on —"

"Yue need n't fear foh Miss Van Ostade. She 's smaht enough."

"Yes, and she is refined and sensitive also."

"But they ah keeping bo'dahs, yue know, and she works ha'd with her own hands."

John smiled. He saw two little work-browned hands lying in Miss Katherine's lap.

"I 'll have to take them there, there 's no alternative, but I 'll —"

"Build the new hotel first," she said with a teasing smile.

"Now, Miss Katherine, that 's like yourself. No, but I 'll do something to keep them from having too much unoccupied time on their hands. I 'll have saddle and carriage horses brought from Asheville, — there 's nothing here, — if you 'll let me have the stables put in order."

"I shall take yue at youh word, John. What would Donald do?"

"Thank you. Then, we will do it, you and I." She laughed a tremulous little laugh. "We will make things hum here. They can have a suite of rooms at the old place for them and their maids, if the present owners will consent, and I will be the devoted son I ought to be. I 'll put off their coming as long as I can, and get Hanford Clark there at the station to take up his quarters at the house. He 's a splendid fellow. I knew him at college. But that matter of bringing Judson Chaplain around must be looked after first. But now, Miss Katherine, good-night. I have tired you out, I know."

"Good-night, John." She took the lamp and conducted him to Donald's old room. Happy Katherine! A new lease of life seemed to have come to her. Softly she looked in on her mother calmly sleeping. "What would ma say?" she thought, and all that night visions of the old gay life filled her slumbers.

CHAPTER VII

UNDER COVER OF DARKNESS

IT is well that we are imprisoned in the bodies we inhabit during our short span of earthly existence; that we are not allowed to imperil our peace, and enjoyment of merry thoughts, and the beauties that are revealed to us in the natural order of events, by erratically wandering about and penetrating into dark places and miserable secrets that would be better hidden from us forever, since the only unutterably terrible and humanly incomprehensible problem in this world, after all, is the existence of sin.

Peacefully sleeping on Donald's bed, in Donald's old room, where everything had been so reverently cared for because it was Donald's, lay John Marshall through that tranquil April night. Could his spirit have gone with the moonbeams, it might have entered the dirty windows of Budd's saloon, where a knot of the male inhabitants were holding an impromptu political meeting, screened from human eyes by coarse paper curtains over the upper half of the windows, and a smearing of white paint over the lower. A kerosene lamp lighted the place. Ranged in a half-circle around a rusty stove and a box of sawdust, some standing, some tilted back in rickety chairs, were the men. None were seated near the stove, for, being in dangerous proximity to the box, they might be hit by the

shots of tobacco juice, which made a continuous, slippery fusillade at it. They talked in low tones, with a languid air, that was at the same time full of suppressed intensity, like the atmosphere of a sultry day before a storm.

One, seated in a chair placed on the hacked and whittled counter, pounded with a stick when all talked at once, or one lifted his voice above the low pitch adopted by all. Patterson, with one leg swung over the corner of the counter, and his elbow on his knee, chewed the end of an elm twig and eyed his companions sharply. He seldom spoke, but was evidently the leading spirit of the meeting.

"We don't want th' m'litia down on us, noh du we want any women 'nd childern cut up," he said at last. "This 'ere 's p'litical business solely, an' th' end justifies th' means, 'nd th' means we 'r' goin' tu use is tu hesh up th' niggers, 'nd cool off some o' them — — No'thern intruders over tu Broadgate. We ah conservative citizens, and we ah not tu be led around by th' nose by a —— No'thern monkey like Monk, noh ah we goin' tu let th' niggers drive. We hold th' reins, gentlemen, an' ah goin' tu keep aholt of 'em."

There was suppressed laughter and murmured applause. Though all had been drinking, none were drunk. Several spoke at once. "Pitch Monk over his trestle." "Tar 'nd fether 'im." "What 's th' matter 'ith givin' Clark a little cold peppeh?" "Send 'im off on one o' his freights." "Wipe out th' niggahs, 'nd one or two o' their backers, 'nd th' thing 's done."

The chairman thumped with his stick. "Gen'lemen, I 'low Mr. Patterson ain't thoo." Patterson threw his chewed twig into the sawdust. "Naw, gen'lemen, I kyan' rightly say as I am thoo; you-all hev been talkin' c'nsiderable, now I 'll talk. Th' hosses is stompin' outside; th' regalia 's in th' closet, ain't it, Budd?"

"Hit 's thar," said Budd.

"Wall, what 's tu hender beginnin' this evenin'?" he looked at his watch.

"That 's th' talk," said one and another.

"Gen'lemen, here 's my plan. Keep th' road on ouh side. Th' prosperity o' th' place demands it. Leave th' agent alone. They 's nothin' ag'in th' agent, an' he leaves us alone. We must take th' head off 'n theih party in this section, by quietly removin' theih candidate."

"That 's th' talk." "Git red o' th' trash." "Drop 'im ovah his trestle."

"They 's tu be no row about it, mind. Ef theih candidate skips th' place, thet 's theih look-out. Hit 's eleven o'clock. We goes tu Monk's room, now. Th' first outgoin' freight passes at one, an' three men bo'ds it, an' tue of 'em returns on hoss-back tu theih own homes (whar they hev been all night, of co'se) befo' daybreak." There was a mur-mur of assent, and Patterson talked on. "Which of yu gen'lemen will take th' ridge mule trail an' lead th' hosses around tu th' first stop beyond th' trestle foh them 'at takes th' freight?" One of the party rose and hitched at the top of his trousers. "Bettah go tue tugethah. Ef one gits stuck, t' other kin make it." Another man rose and hitched at his

trousers. "Thet 's well. Yu tue bettah start. Yu won't mo' than make it in two houahs. Hold on a minute. Whose hosses yu goin' tu take?" Two more men rose, one a huge muscular mountaineer, hitched at the tops of their trousers, and silently removed the plugs of tobacco from their mouths. "Thet 's well," said Patterson again, with slow intensity. "Take theih hosses 'nd be gone."

They went out, and soon the clatter of hoofs was heard going toward the ridge trail. Addressing the men who rose last, Patterson continued: "Youh th' right men fo' th' right place. That settles Monk. By duin' these things sharp, they 's no need tu du th' dirty work ovah again."

"Mount make an example o' one o' th' niggahs," said Budd. "This 'ere cussed young strut ovah-head is top o' th' heap amongst 'em, readin' th' papahs an' retailin' trash at theih meetin's. Swing 'im f'om his pole, an' they won't be no mo' niggahs' p'litical meetin's, I reckon."

"Naw, let 'im strut awhile. We 'll look aftah 'im latah ef he don't hesh." Patterson left the counter where he had remained with scarcely a change of position during the whole of his talk. The chairman came down from his perch.

Half an hour later a small band of draped figures, masked and armed, left Budd's saloon, and marched silently to the corner store, where the lawyer had his rooms, and divided. Four of them quietly climbed the stairway, an outside one, the door at the top was quickly pried open, there was the sound of a few low-spoken words, a short scuffle, and soon five figures left the room, one led between two,

draped and masked like the rest. No word was spoken. They joined the party waiting below, crossed the street, and stood back silently in the shadow of the freight-house. Soon the outgoing train, consisting of three empty cars and a caboose also empty, thundered up to the station. One of the men was roughly lifted into the caboose, two others climbed hastily in after him, and the train moved on. When the agent had locked the freight-house, and taken his way back to his quarters at Scrapp's, the rest emerged from their concealment and moved stealthily away.

Could John Marshall's spirit have gone with the moonbeams in all their silent journeyings, he would have peered into a little log church a few miles from Patterson, half hidden in a wild glen. Behind it was a perpendicular wall of lichen-covered rock, down which water was forever trickling. Ferns growing in the ledges nodded as the sparkling drops fell on them. In front a small stream dashed with continuous rushing noise over immense boulders. A path, a mere narrow mule-track, wound high up along the bank of the stream. The glen was beautiful beyond description, and wild as if so tame a creature as man never had visited it.

While the men gathered in Budd's saloon were still meditatively firing at the box of sawdust, some thirty or more negroes had stealthily collected here. They sat on rude benches of plank, resting on rough blocks sawed from solid logs. A wooden chair and a table on which were two tallow candles were in one end of the room and near them — a strange article of furniture for so rude a place — was a small cabinet

organ covered with a shabby green cloth. After being addressed by one and another of their number, a tall, sinewy, gray-haired mulatto arose. He was an exhorter, and spoke much after the fashion of the camp-meeting.

"Bred'ren, an'," he was going to say sisters, but recollecting that no sisters were present, added, "an' all yo'-uns wha' is heah. Dis ain' no common subjec' wha' has drawed we-all heah. Yo'-all t'ink yo' gwine vote nex' week? Naw, bred'ren, an' — naw, yo' gwine stan' raoun' an' be knock' on de haid like yo' 's ol' used up hosses, wha' ain' got no mo' pow' fo' tu hol' yo'se'fs tugedder. I tell yo', bred'ren, I 's seed an' had de 'speunce. Yo' reckon yo' 's free 'case yo' ain' had de lash ovah yo' haids, but I tell yo', yo' ain' free yit. I kyan' read like Josephus yandah, or Brudder Chas heah, — I kyan' tell what-all is in de papahs he done brung tu de meet'n', but, bred'ren, we-all ain' sot free ontwell we kin call de souls de Lawd done gib us ouh own."

Josephus left the room at the beginning of the old man's talk. He had already spoken, urging upon them that they had a right to vote their own ticket like white men, that they were all free men, and had only to do a little knocking on their own account, and show themselves men to succeed.

After the old man had spoken at some length, Lord Chesterfield came forward, unbuttoned his coat, and drew out some papers and a notebook with a pompous air. Although a fop, he was no fool. He possessed a strong will, and loved power. The moonlight stole through the dusty little window and fell on his softly curling, silky black hair.

His face seemed a dead white in the dusk of the candle-light. He spoke well, using notebook and papers ostentatiously. He had evidently been primed by Monk, who was running for the office of circuit judge.

"Uncle Isaac 's done tol' de troof. We-all 's not free yit, an' we nebber will be free ontwell we gits a No'thun jedge in dis-yer No'th C'liny, an' Monk 's de man, gen'l'men. He has de hull taoun yandah tu Broadgate on his side. They 's put' nigh all No'thun men dar."

"Yas, yo' 's nuffin' but a young cock l'arnin' tu crow. Yo' has a heap tu l'arn yit," muttered old Isaac.

While Chas strutted about with coat thrown open, and thumbs thrust in the armholes of his vest, Josephus was wandering far from the cabin, with a brown paper parcel under his arm, evidently searching for some one among the rocks, and leaving poor Bonaparte tied to a sapling near the church.

"Yas, gen'l'men, we-all 's got tu be cl'ar dum still an' circumspec' an' nebber let on like we-uns gwine tu jump," continued Chas. "Dis-yer 's mighty ticklesome business. I hyahs a heap yandah ovah de sto' an' nuvvah lets on like I hyahs nuffin'. Ef dey 'low tu hendah we-uns in ouh fa'r, right, an' jus' privileges, I 's gwine —"

Suddenly every man sprang to his feet and the lights were extinguished. A shot rang through the glen and reverberated from rock to rock of its perpendicular sides. Uncle Isaac peered through the window, screened by the darkness within, and saw two horsemen ride over a rise in the path and dis-

appear in the shadows. Along the trail rode the two men who had first left Budd's saloon, each leading a horse saddled. They took note of the light in the cabin, and the mule tied to the sapling.

"Thet thar 's Josephus' mule," said one. "Th' niggahs is up tu sump'n in thar. See th' light in th' winders?"

The other said nothing, but levelled his revolver at the creature's head and fired. The animal dropped with a groan, and the men rode on.

"Josephus is a mighty high-steppin' niggah," said he who fired the shot, slipping a new cartridge in the place of the one just used, and pocketing the weapon.

The candles were not relighted in the little log church that night. The men stole out and scattered silently to their homes.

"Naw, bred'ren, we-all ain' free yit. We 's undah de sto'm-claoud," said Isaac, in a low voice, as he looked at the dead mule.

"Cl'issy, she 'll be mighty cut up ovah dis-yer," said another. "She lays a heap on Josephus an' dat ah mule team o' his'n."

"Hit sarves Joe like he 'd ought tu be sarved, fo' duin' sech a fool trick. What he done brung de mule heah fo' anyhow? Hit jes' lets on we-all 's hol'n' meet'n's heah, a-hee-hawin' outside. He ain' nuffin' but a fool nigger anyhow, — kyan' du nuffin' but hollah an' sing," said Chas, angrily. "Whar is he gone now? Hunt'n' a'ter a possom mo' 'n likely."

CHAPTER VIII

JOSEPHUS' SECRET

JOSEPHUS, prowling among the rocks near the bridge, where he had rescued Portia that afternoon, heard the shot in the distance, but gave no heed. Creeping among the blackest shadows, he entered a sort of cave high among the crags overhanging the stream.

"Pete Gunn, come out o' dar," he called in low tones; "no use o' yo' hid'n' heah." No answer came. "Pete, ef yo' doan quit hangin' raoun' dis hole, I 's gwine tu Patterson, 'n' tell de she'iff yo' 's heah." His eyes, grown used to the darkness, descried a black bundle in one corner. He touched it with his foot, and a man struggled to his feet with an inarticulate snarl, like a wild animal. The wretched creature shook from head to foot.

"Wha' yo' hunt'n' me fo', Josephus? I ain' done nuffin' tu yo'-uns."

Josephus leaned against the wall of the cave, regarding the trembling creature before him. "Why n't yo' behave yo'se'f? Wha' yo' done wid de money Gabr'ella gib yo' fo' tu git tu Raleigh?"

The man muttered about being sick and starving.

"Naw, yo' low daoun niggah; yo' 's drinkin'. I kin smell de whuskey oft'n yo'. Yo' 's hangin' raoun steal'n' Jim Throop's moonshine whuskey, an' pitchin' rocks daoun on folkses' haids, an' killin' ol' women."

"I nebber, fo' de Lawd, I nebber did n' kill nobody, sho 's I bohned a niggah."

"Wha' fo' yo' stan'in' dar wid de rock ovah de lady's haid?"

"I 's starvin', I tell yo'."

"Well, yo' gwine eat de lady?" Josephus lifted his arm as if he would strike the cowering figure to the earth.

"Lawd! Josephus, doan strike. I 's starvin' an' dyin'. I war gwine git dat ar gol' off'n her, — dat gol' chain an' pin, — and git Kit tu sell 'em tu git me victuals. I 's starvin'. Crawlin' an' hid'n', an' nuffin' tu keep de life in me but sasafrax root 'n' whuskey. Gabr'ella gone back on me, Mam Gunn won' he'p none. I kyan' move in de daytime 'daout de officers haul me back tu de chain-gang."

"Naw, Gabr'ella ain' gone back on yo' neider." Josephus opened his parcel. "Heah I been totin' dis-yer meat 'n' co'n bread she done sont yo' — 'pears like I kyan' b'leeb yo' no kin tu her noway. Ef 'twain' fo' her I 'd sen' de she'iff a'ter yo'. Sho nuff, yo' gwine kill de lady, heav'n' rocks daoun on her haid?" The poor creature clutched at the meat, and began tearing it with his teeth. Josephus seated himself on a boulder, watching him in silence. "I 's baoun' tu git de troof aout'n yo'," he said at last, "or gib yo' up, one. What-all yo' been duin' sence yo' git shet o' de chain-gang? Wha' fo' yo' kill de ol' 'oman yandah up de maount'n?"

Pete paused with his chunk of meat half-devoured. "Wha' fo' yo' talkin' 'baouts kill'n' foh? Ain' I done tell yo' I nebber did n' kill nobody?"

"Whose clo'es yo' got on?"

"His'n. Hi. Toplins 's wha' I wo'k fo'; dat time de officers come daoun on us. I roll off'n de han'-cah, 'n' cut fo' de bresh when all han's was driben de cah ontu de bredge. De ovahseeah holla an' shoot, but dey could n' stop de cah ontwell hit cl'ar on de middle o' de bredge, en dey baoun' tu git on, 'case de train comin' on 'hine dem. Dat-a-way hu-come I git shet o' de chain-gang. I been nigh daid wid de starvin', kyan' take nuffin' 'daout dey track me. I jes' made aout tu lib an' crawl back tu Toplins' place 'g'in. De ol' 'oman she daoun by de branch washin', an' I he'p myself tu all de victuals in de cabin, an' I see her haid a-bobbin' ovah de tub, an' de ol' man's clo'es hangin' 'hine de do' an' I tuk his'n an' lef' mine dar. Dat-a-way hu-cum I got shet o' de jail clo'es." He began tearing at the meat again.

"Mine, ef yo' 's lyin' I 's gwine gib yo' up."

"Fo' de Lawd, I ain' tellin' no lie. I done went home, an' Nance, she kep' me awhile, twell Kit, she see de officers comin', den I run 'n clum in de wash-kittle daoun 'hine de big gum, 'n' Nance, she wait twell she see 'em lookin' at her, den she pitch in hul' ahmful o' clo'es, an' trow in bucket o' watah, like she gwine begin wash'n', 'nd holla, 'Kit, yo' light de fiah,' an' Kit she git de chips tugedder like she gwine light de fiah undah de kittle right smaht, an' Nance she g' long tu de haouse, an' talk wid de men. Dey sarch de haouse, an' pitch de baids aout de do' 'n' cahy on like dey debbles, an' Nance 'low tu me, dey done tol' her I done kill ol' man Toplins' wife yandah up de maount'n. Mo' likely he done

hit he's own se'f. I knows him. I hyearn him holla at her heap o' times like he gwine kill 'er."

"Yo' knows he ain' dar. Dey tu'k him 'long o' yo'-uns moonshinin', and put 'im in de white 'tentiary."

"Huh! He ain' dar?" shouted the wretch, angrily. "Did n' I see 'im snoopin' raoun' de mill yis'day? Gohses doan walk in de day, baig'in' fo' whuskey. He kill 'er he's se'f. He come home, an' dar he fin' de clo'es gone, an' 'low she done sell 'em, an' kill 'er. Dat ar hu-cum she daid." He gave a low guttural laugh, and began tearing the bread from the loaf with his teeth. Josephus kicked at him, and stepped out of the cave into the moonlight.

"Yo' brute hog, I 'low dat tu good name fo' yo'. I 'low yo' ain' no kin tu Gabr'ella noway."

The man called after him piteously: "Josephus, O Josephus, doan gib me up. I tell yo' he done hit he's own se'f."

"Haish! Yo' gwine gib yo' own se'f up holla'n' like dat-a-way?"

There was sudden silence in the woods, then a great owl in a thicket close to Josephus hooted with a wild fearful cry, that rang through the wood like the shriek of a despairing soul, making the flesh creep and tingle. "Trouble gwine come," he muttered. The cry was answered from farther up the gorge, like a reawakening of the first echo, whereat the bird left the thicket, and flew softly and swiftly past him, like the despairing soul itself impelled to its doom. Its shadow fell on him as it passed.

"'Pears like Pete done holla an' died, an' dar goes he's ghos'. Trouble gwine come now sho." But

Pete had only crawled into the farthest corner of the cave, and was drinking from a jug of whiskey he had stolen from the mill the day before. There in drunken stupor he lay, only rousing at the close of the second day to drink himself again unconscious with what remained in the jug.

Josephus hurried toward the little log church, scrambling dexterously over rough, dangerous places, and cutting across an intervening hill, and down the precipitous sides of the gorge, hoping to reach the cabin before his absence would be discovered. All was still, and the lights out.

"'Pears like dey done cl'ar out o' heah mighty suddent," he said. He saw the mule lying where he had tied it, and gently touched it with his foot. "Git up, Bony, yo' lazy. H'ist, mule." Something uncanny in its stillness startled him. He stooped and touched its ears. "Daid, sho nuff daid. I knowed trouble gwine come when dat owel done hollah at me." He scratched his head, ruminating mournfully, as he walked around the dead beast. "Dey done come daoun heah, an' broke up de meet'n', 'an kill de po' critter."

He sat down on a log, his head between his hands, his pride broken. If they had sought out a way to hurt him with a refinement of cruelty, they could not have done so more effectually than by killing his mule, except by shooting its mate as well. He heard the trampling of horses' hoofs over the stony trail. Screened as he was by his blackness blending with the dark bank and the shadows, he remained unseen as the four riders passed. Their voices sounded clear and strong in the narrow ravine.

"I 'low we 've done this puty slick," said one.

"We 'll know soon, ef we see th' buzzards hangin' round th' spot," said another. Supposing they spoke of his mule, Josephus determined to bury the animal next day.

Old Clarissa had waited his return through the long slow hours, meditating, smoking her cob pipe, and now and then adding a stick of "light-'ud" to keep the fire going as she crouched over the hearth. She hated darkness, and the dancing flame and old lame pussy at her feet were her companions.

"Whar yo' been loafin'?" she queried as he entered, long past midnight.

"Nowhar," he said, scowling and touching the cat with his foot.

"Yo' leab de cat 'lone. Is yo' niggers been hol'n' meetin's? did n' I tol' yo' leab dem ah tu de white folkses? Dey 'll hab yo' hangin' f'om a tree one o' dese days, I reckon."

He stood by the fire a few moments in sullen silence, then climbed a ladder leading through a trap-door into a loft above. She heard his steps overhead, and then all was still. He had thrown himself, dressed as he was, on his straw bed, decently covered with patchwork quilt of his mother's own making.

Old Clarissa puffed at her half-consumed pipe until it went out. She moved her lips from time to time as if communing with herself. At last the words broke out in a sort of half-moaning prayer: —

"Oh, Lawd! doan yo' know de h'a't ob de sorrowin' Lawd? I ain' done nuffin', Lawd. Yo' knows hu-come I done hit. Ef yo' visits de sins ob de

fathahs on de chillen, ain' dat nuff, Lawd, 'daout visitin' de sins ob de mudders on 'em tu? Lawd, leab de boy 'lone, an' tek he's ol' mudder 'way f'om de trials an' de tribulations comin'. Leab de boy 'lone. Lawd, I done ax yo' heap o' times tek ol' Cl'issy home. Kyan' I go home, Lawd? Hu-come yo' leab me heah in de way? I ain' done nuffin'. Tek me an' leab de boy 'lone."

She drew the ashes over the coals, and crept shivering into bed. Not into the best bed with its gay pieced cover and pure white pillows, — no, no. That was a sacred ornament to her little cabin. Only one being had ever slept in it. She, like an angel from heaven, had come among them, lived among them, and brought on herself the contumely of her white neighbors by teaching the blacks; but while they ostracized and ignored her, she was saved from brutality by her sweetness and beauty and physical frailty. During a few short years, what had she not accomplished, unrewarded, as men reckon rewards! She had brought a measure of refinement into a few degraded homes, had taught day school and night school, had organized a Sabbath school, and had taught Gabriella Gunn to play her little cabinet organ, which she bequeathed to their little church at her death. Lovingly she had been laid to rest on the wild hillside, and a rude board placed at the head of her grave, which had been fenced about to prevent stray cattle from tramping over it.

Mammy Clarissa never wearied of telling how Miss Mann had slept in her "bes' baid dat time she got cotched in de sto'm o' lightnin'."

In the earliest dawn Josephus climbed down his ladder, softly stepping past his mother's couch, and gently drawing to the door after him. He rode away from the little clearing on old Jude's back with a shovel and pick strapped together over his shoulder. The earth smiled drowsily under the charm of a sweet May dawn, but he felt none of the sweetness. He set his teeth hard as he dug his heels into the mule's sides and galloped up and down the mountain road, through patches of slanting shadows, and under boughs still dripping from a slight shower.

"Dey ain' gwine kick me dat-a-way," he muttered. "I 's hab anuddah mule right smaht, I reckon."

After covering the carcass of poor Bonaparte, and concealing the place with brush, he rode on. A cat-bird whistled merrily in a thicket of dogwood and oaks; the breath of the morning blew in his face, sweet with the odor of blossoms and the earth, but he rode sulkily with head drooped. Presently he drew an old stocking from his bosom and began counting his little hoard of savings, mostly dimes, three-cent pieces, and pennies, with one or two bills which he had earned doing odd jobs for Mr. Ridgeway and the two young planters. Suddenly he drew rein so quickly as to set Jude back on her haunches. His face expanded. He lifted his head and drew in a deep breath.

"I 's gwine see Mist' Dutton 'n' Mist' Craig," he said. "I 'low dey 'll le' me job fo' de money. Git up, Jude, yo' 's gwine hab nurrer mate right smaht. I 'low Gabr'ella sha'n't know dis-yer ontwell I come clatt'n' 'long wid de span. Git."

He turned and took another trail, which led over an intervening hill into a sheltered valley, where the soil was deep and enriched by washings from the surrounding slopes. Here the young orchard was set, and its thrifty owners were already on the edge of the plantation preparing for a day's cultivating.

"I tell you there is something at the bottom of all this," said Richard, as he buckled the horses' head-strap. "I rode by Throop's mill yesterday, and if I did n't see old Toplins disappear through the shed door I have no eyesight. I knew his limp. If he 's been discharged, what 's he hiding for? Why does n't he walk up and make a stir about the murder? The old sinner is back in the old business, or else he knows more of the other affair than is safe for him."

"Both, more than likely," said Craig.

"Well, what 's to be done about it?"

"Nothing. Let them manage their own concerns. I see no reason why we should meddle. Pete 's a low-down nigger anyway, so what 's the odds? If he gets lynched now it may save him from committing a murder in the future, if he did n't do this."

Richard laughed. "Your idea of justice is on a par with Lord Chesterfield's idea of religion. 'He 's baoun' tu be 'ligious, 'case de niggers heah-'bouts doan know no bettah nohow. Dey 'll t'ink he a bohned fool ef he doan holla glory hallelooya tu de meet'n's.' — Hello, Josephus, where did you drop from?"

"How'dy, Mist' Dutton, how'dy, Mist' Craig." Josephus made his most deferential bow. "I jes' thought as haow I'd drap raoun' heah dis maw'n —"

He hesitated, then throwing himself off Jude's back he took a step nearer. "Is yo'-uns been intu Patterson sence las' ebenin'?" he dropped his voice to a low tone.

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Dey done been up tu some debblement, I 'low. Some fool debble done kill my mule." His voice shook. "Dey kyan' kick me dat-a-way. I 's gwine git de law on 'em. I 's gwine —"

"Where was the mule?" interrupted Dick.

"Yandah by de log chu'ch in de hollah. I 's gwine —"

"How did he come to be there?" said Craig, impatiently. "When was it?"

"I done rode 'im dar."

"What were you doing there?"

Josephus looked off over the treetops in an absent way.

"What are you niggers up to?" Craig spoke sharply.

"Dar 's de chu'ch. We cullud people all goes tu chu'ch right smaht."

"Yes, you colored people are a right smart set. You 've been holding political meetings right smart, and I opine you 'll some of you be swinging from the trees in Patterson with ropes round your necks right smart too, before you know it."

Josephus' face grew, if possible, a shade darker than its wont. Richard spoke up with a short laugh. "Why don't you put a bullet into some o' their mules?"

"Richard, you know better than to give such advice as that. I tell you, Josephus, you fellows have

got to keep quiet. There 's no use in your holding meetings and trying to get into politics; you must wait till the South cools off. They 're red hot yet from the licking they 've had. You keep still and wait and educate yourselves. Get ready to vote by learning to read and write and think, and then — "

" Lawd! Mist' Craig, what 's yo' talkin' 'bout? We ain' no skyule o' ouh own. Ouh chillun ain' 'lowed in de white folkses' skyule. Dar ain' five niggahs in dis-yer county kin read 'nd figgah. Git de ed'caishun! Ef we kyan' git de law fo' we-uns, hucome we gwine git de ed'caishun? "

Richard, seated on a stump, was pounding a sapling twig with the handle of his knife. His was one of those rare natures that never outlive their boyhood. He was making a whistle. " Jim," he said, looking up in his friend's face, " I tell you what I think. I think this whole business is darned mean. It 's low-down mean." The bark came off with a quick jerk. He looked at it, and turned it over in his hand meditatively. " You wanted something of us, did n't you, Joe? Out with it, don't mind him. Craig barks; he never bites. I 'm the fellow that bites."

Josephus' heart was too heavy. He could not smile. " I 's baoun' tu git nurrer mule," he hesitated. The young men were silent. Richard kept on whittling. " I — I — come raoun' tu ax yo'-uns fo' de loan o' de money. I 'low I kin git right smaht o' jobbin' f'om Mist' Ridgeway, and dar 's young Mist' Mahshall come back 'g'in, I 'low he 'll he'p some, an' I done save a right smaht

o' money heah." He drew the stocking from his bosom.

"Well, how much have you there?" said Craig.

Josephus poured the money into his red cotton handkerchief and began laboriously counting it. "Heah's eight dollahs."

"I guess there's more than that," said Craig, stooping down and separating the coins with one finger. "Eight dollars and seventy-five cents."

Josephus took a silver quarter from his trousers' pocket, adding it to the heap. It had a hole in it, and he was saving it for luck. "Dar's nine dollahs," he said.

"How much will a mule cost?" said Craig.

"I done give fifty-one dollahs fo' dat ar mule dey done kill."

"He can't get a mate for this one for less than that," said Dick.

"Well," said Craig, taking the reins of their idle team, and drawing up their heads impatiently, "well, what do you say?"

Richard laughed in his deliberate way. He placed the whistle between his lips and blew a shrill note. "We must have that stone hauled for the lower road," he said, then shutting his knife with a click he thrust it deep in his trousers' pocket, and drew out his wallet and proceeded to investigate the contents. "I declare, I'm not very flush," said he. "What do you say?"

Josephus drew out a huge silver watch and eyed it lovingly. It had been given to his father by his old master, and was a precious possession. He turned it over in his hand and watched the faces

of the two young men. They quietly calculated their expenses for the next two months, and made up the money between them. Then James Craig turned sharply around.

"Look here, Josephus," he said, "you 're no fool, if you are black. You 're not to let on to a living soul where you got this money, hear? Here. Give me that watch. There! Now, if anything is said, say you sold your watch, and when this money is made up, we 'll give it back, and you can say you bought it back again. See? That lets us out, and you, too. Mind, we don't want your watch; you must job for us for part of the money, and pay down what you can, and we 'll give you all summer to do it in."

"I decla'r', fo' de Lawd, Mist' Craig, I 'll job fo' de money right fa'r, an' I 'll ax de Lawd fo' tu bress yo'-uns," exclaimed Josephus, fervently.

Craig smiled grimly as Josephus disappeared over the trail. "I suppose we are a pair of fools," he said, gathering up the reins again.

Dick threw away his whistle, and seizing the handles of the cultivator jerked it into place, and they started down the long row of young trees. "It was a dirt mean trick," he said at last, "and the fellow deserved help."

CHAPTER IX

A DUSKY COQUETTE

WHILE Josephus was solemnly burying his mule, Gabriella Gunn was preparing a breakfast of bacon, corn bread, and molasses in her stepmother's cabin, for a swarm of hungry black urchins. Nance, the mother of the brood, sat in one corner spinning, and smoking her cob pipe, unheeding the hubbub around her. Gabriella went back and forth from the fireplace to the table, around which the children stood, cooking and serving them at the same time. A coffee-pot and a few dishes were in a rude cupboard near the fireplace, but on the table were only an iron pan of corn cakes, baked nearly an inch thick, and the black jug of sorghum molasses. The corn cakes she broke apart and saturated with molasses, or sandwiched with bacon, and gave into the outstretched, greasy little black paws.

"Yo' Alexandah, haish." A howl of anger burst forth from a chubby youngster who had been quietly licking the corn-cob stopper of the molasses jug. "Sal, quit yo' snatchin'; I'll box yo' d'rec'ly." The rude meal finished, she gave to the largest girl a long homespun towel and sent them all down "tu de branch," to wash off the grease and molasses. Then she set the table with a few dishes for Nance and herself and made coffee.

"Come, Nance," she said at length, "leab go an' eat." Nance rose slowly, shook the ashes from her pipe into the fireplace, and laid it on the table. She was a large, comely negress, with a red cotton turban on her head, and huge gold loops in her ears.

Her husband had been dead a year, but she and Gabriella had done much better without him, since his presence in the household had brought no other income to the family than the addition yearly of another black urchin to the swarm around their door to be clothed and fed; yet Nance had mourned him loudly ever since he had been found dead in the branch, where he had fallen in a drunken fit.

"I 'low Pete 's daid," said Nance.

"Naw, Pete ain' daid. He 's hid'n' yandah by Throop's mill. We ain' shet o' Pete yet."

"Why n't yo' leab Pete be took? He ain' no good tu we-uns nohow."

"I ain' gwine 'low no kin tu me be hung. Pete gits drunk, but he doan kill ol' women."

The doorway was suddenly darkened, and both women started.

"Laws, Mist' Mahshall!" said Nance. "Hu-come yo' heah fo' sun-up? I declar' yo' gib my h'a't sich a jump hit like tu made me holla."

It was Lord Chesterfield. Nance and he greeted each other with elaborate courtesy, while Gabriella, with her back to him, went on with her cooking. Nance looked on him as a fine match for her stepdaughter, and beamed on him with shining face as she urged him to sit and eat. Piqued at Gabriella's silence, he would not be pacified by Nance's kind offer. He remained standing, leaning

against the doorpost, and made facetious, sarcastic remarks, and told of Josephus' loss with evident satisfaction.

Gabriella took a wooden bucket and left the cabin as he talked. She entered a cow-shed at the rear, and began milking. Soon he came sauntering by the door and stooped to look in. She glanced up at him sideways.

"Ain' yo' mighty fine an' peart tu be stan'in' raoun' a caow-shed?" she asked.

"Yo' haish," he said with a laugh. "Yo' gittin' so big-feelin' I kyan' keep step wid yo' no mo', sence Mist' Ridgeway come daoun heah sta'tin' a bo'din'-haous, yo' tu'nin' ovah sich a heap o' money wid dis-yer caow 'n' chick'ns."

Gabriella made no answer; the milk streamed into the pail with a steady swish, swish, while the cow stood with half-closed eyes, chewing her cud. A black hen scratched and clucked contentedly to her brood outside the door. Chas walked away, but as Gabriella ceased milking and took up her pail, he turned back.

"Look a-heah," he said, going close to her side, "ain' yo' an' me nebber gwine git jined? Heah I been co'tin' yo' ebber sence I come back, an' yo' doan say nuff'n' 'g'in hit, an' now yo' go cuttin' sich capahs, like I wan' no mo' dan de graoun' yo' walks on."

She put down her pail, and stood facing him with arms akimbo, then swaying her lithe form back and forth, she broke into laughter. Chas bore her merriment a moment, then seizing her by the arm he shook her.

"Quit dis-yer foolin'. I come heah fo' ax yo' is we gwine git jined. I ain' gwine be fooled wid dis-a-way no mo'."

She pulled away, and taking up the pail turned toward the cabin, still shaking with laughter. With one stride he placed himself between her and the door.

"Yo' ain' gwine git shet o' me dat-a-way."

"Naw, I ain' gwine git shet o' yo' dat-a-way," she said, and turning again she entered the shed, and passing through a place where a board had fallen from the farther side, was back in the cabin singing and talking with Nance before he realized how she had escaped him.

"Dar's Sis' Catherine jes' dyin' fo' a sight o' yo', Chas," she called after him as he strode sullenly away. "Why n't yo' call thar, sence yo' out an' right peart dis mawnin'? Heah, Kit," she continued, as the children came scuffling back from the stream below, "yo' tu'n de cow loose, an' mine yo' watch aout; do'n let her run off like yo' did yis'day."

Well might Chas be sullen. Often had his dusky Phillis tormented him thus, only to stimulate his wilful nature to more persistent attentions. This morning he had meant to gloat over Josephus' loss, and say smart things at his expense, not to press his suit. Since she would not listen to the former, he had been teased into the latter, and now, vexed beyond measure, he kicked the sticks out of his path, and shied stones at the few stray cows browsing in the underbrush, along the way to his lonely striped pole.

"Yo' ain' nebber gwine git nudder man like dat come co'tin' yo'," said Nance, watching him disappear down the windings of the road. "Yo' cahy yo' haid like yo' tu good fo' de bes', yo' does. Cutt'n' capahs like yo' a bohn'd lady wha' sits in de po'ch an' waves de fan, an' calls de fine gen'lem tu de railin' tu bow deir haids, an' talk an' laugh, yo' does."

"Oh, g' long. He t'ink'n haow he gwine set in de po'ch he's own se'f an' 'low me du de totin' fo him. I knows Chas. He 'lows tu git de cow an' de buttah, an' de chickin an' de aigs. Ain' yo' 'n' me wo'k an' strive fo' dese heah? I ain' longin' fo' no man tu hang raoun' de doah, I ain'." She seated herself at a rude loom in one end of the cabin. These women spun the yarn and wove the cloth for many of their neighbors as well as themselves. Her body swayed back and forth as she threw the shuttle, and the heavy beam rose and fell. "Dar's Pete," she went on. "No good he is. Allus drunk."

"Yo' paw nuvvah did n' brung Pete up right," said Nance.

"Dey ain' nobody brung up right, I reckon," said Gabriella.

"Yo' ain' nuthin' tu say," said her stepmother. She was proud of Gabriella's accomplishments, and never missed an opportunity of telling how she could "play on de melogimum dat fine yo''s would cl'ar jump and holla, tu hear how she make de chune fly."

"Pete moughnt 'a' had de same chance I had ef he'd a min' tu wo'k like I done wo'k."

"Pete did n' ought tu lef' wo'kin' on de co'n-patch," said Nance. While the two women talked, the subject of their conversation still lay in the cave of gray rock, in drunken stupor, the jug of whiskey half empty, and the food Gabriella had sent him half eaten.

CHAPTER X

MORNING SONGS AND DOGWOOD BLOOMS

PORTIA stood under one of the arched gateways in the early morning, looking up at the great silent house, and then down the road where the line of rail fence stretched itself, a fascinating tangle of wild shrubbery in full bloom. Lifting her dress a little, she moved one neatly clad foot about in the long grass and weeds to see if it were too wet to venture after dogwood blossoms.

"Good-morning, Josephus," she said brightly. "Has the man been taken yet? I would have been hurt if you had not come along yesterday."

"Naw, Miss Po'tia." He looked meditatively off a moment, then dismounting, he approached her, and said in a low tone, "Miss Po'tia, is yo' gwine be mad wid me? I nuvvah tole 'em whar Pete war. Gabr'ella, yo' knows her, wha' totes yo' aigs 'n' buttah, she 's a right smaht, peart gal. She no low-down niggah. I ain' gwine 'low no kin tu her be took an' hung tu de fus' tree come 'long, fo' what he nuvvah did n' du."

"Why, Josephus, how dare you? He might kill some one else, and the murder would be on your head," she exclaimed in horror.

"Naw, Pete nuvvah," he replied, earnestly. "Her own husban' done hit. De ol' man he bery debbil, he are. He 's aout'n de 'tentiary hid'n' yandah in ol'

Throop's mill. He do'n dar show he's se'f. Ef he did n' done hit, hu-come he doan come aout an' make a fuss 'bouts de killin' o' he's woman?"

"But you don't know, Josephus; you may be put in prison yourself for hiding him."

"Yas, I knows. Pete low-down good-fo'-nuth'n' niggah, but he ain' no mo' ha'm dan any po' fool wha' kyan' leab de whuskey 'lone. He starvin', pore critter. He kyan' git nuffin' tu eat 'daout he gits took."

"But you see what he was going to do to me."

"Yas, Miss Po'tia, I knows. He war gwine git dat gol' chain off'n yo' 'n' git Kit tu sell hit tu git 'im victuals."

"Why, can't you see, Josephus, what a risk you are running to let such a man have his liberty? What if you had n't come by when you did? What would have become of me?"

"I knows, Miss Po'tia, dar's whar 't is. De Lawd done sont me dat time. Ain' yo' b'leeb de Lawd watchin' aout right smaht fo' we-uns?"

"Why, certainly, but he does n't always interfere. How was it with the poor old woman up the mountain, else? The Lord does n't mean creatures like that to run at large; he ought to be shut up."

Josephus scratched his head a moment. Jude was contentedly eating grass by the roadside. "Miss Po'tia, heah 's wha' I t'inks. De Lawd done sont me tu save yo' an' he'p Pete. Ol' man Toplins kill he's woman he's own se'f. He wusser 'n a mad pizen ho'net. I done took Pete a hunk o' co'n bread 'n' meat fo' Gabr'ella, fo' keep de life in 'im; 'n' I done got tu bury de mule fo' dat tu," he added

bitterly, "an' when dey debbles gits off'n de scent, we gwine sen' 'im aout'n de country right smaht." His voice rose in an angry quiver. "Ain' I hones' man? Hu-come dey go shoot'n' my mule? We kyan' git nothin', noh hol' nothin', 'daout dey debbles tek hit. Ef I 'low Pete be took, dey 'll hang him 'daout a hyarin'. Ef I 'low him git cl'ar, dey 'll fin' out ol' Toplins, an' de right man 'll be hung likely. Oh, Mis Po'tia, doan tell 'em. I sw'ar Pete nebber done hit. Dar 's Gabr'ella, she ain' done nuffin' tu hab sich a brudder nohow. Miss Po'tia, yo' doan know how de worl' are in dis-yer No'th C'liny. I kyan' 'low Pete be took."

"I don't know, Josephus," Portia shook her head.

With shaking voice he implored, "Oh, doan! I sw'ar he won' do no ha'm. I 'll watch 'im an' sen' 'im away, shuah. Dar 's Gabr'ella; yo' knows her?"

"Yes, I am sorry for her, but think how dreadful to be the means of having any more such awful crimes committed."

"Miss Po'tia, I sw'ar fo' de good Lawd, I kyan' du no mo', dat I won' 'low no ha'm come. Doan say nuffin' ontwell yo' knows like I knows. Ef Pete 's took, dar 'll be murder too, an' de white folks 'll du de killin'."

"Well, I 'll wait a little, Josephus, but it 's a fearful thing, unless you are perfectly sure."

"Ef I wan' pufeckly shuah I would n' ax yo', but, Lawd, I kyan' 'low him be took. I knows how dey debbles does, I kyan' 'low Pete be took, 'case he 's a libbin' critter, an' de way dey does, 'pears lak dey 'd hu't 'im ef he war stone daid." He spoke almost in a whisper, and she shuddered. "De Lawd bress yo',

Miss Po'tia, de Lawd's sun shine on yo' all yo' days."

"Oh, dear!" she said, looking after him. "What can one do? But there, I can't help it now, and I am going to keep still." She shut her lips firmly and pushed back her hair with both hands.

"I don't care if it is wet," she said. She tucked up her skirts, glanced down the road at a tall dogwood waving over the rail fence, and then at the house, where the curtains were still drawn, and started on a run, arriving at the goal with rosy cheeks and shortened breath. The flowers were out of reach, but she climbed the fence and pulled the boughs down, loosening her hair and losing her hat. "There!" she said at last, adding one more spray to the heap below. The sun, just rising, touched the tops of the hills with gold, while the valley still slept beneath the mists. Oh, the enchanting world! A fairyland of beauty and song! She sat on the top rail of the fence, and throwing one arm around the dogwood, leaned her head against it and looked off, watching the mists slowly rise like a curtain, revealing the long slopes of meadow beneath and the shining river in the distance. A cat-bird in a laurel thicket began singing anew. Portia lifted her head, listened a moment, and then sang too.

That tormenting rascal, Cupid, a regular will-o'-the-wisp for leading poor men into swamps of dilemmas, had perched himself at John Marshall's bed's head before daybreak, and pricking him with an arrow, had whispered, "Portia Van Ostade," in his ear. That was enough. His poor victim

tossed and turned. If he dozed, it was only to see the great living-room of the old home, and the tea table, and Portia's fair face above it. The oftener he saw this winning face, the more determined he became to some day possess it, — to own it, as it were. Men, young men at least, always expect to own their wives just as they have owned their devoted mothers and sisters. What were wives and mothers and sisters created for, if not for men, of course? The only creature of womankind a man cannot own is his daughter, if he be fortunate enough to have one. Her he must educate, earn for, live for, and love, that some other man may eventually own her. O righteous retribution! Poor fathers of daughters!

John bore the torments of the mischievous arrows for a time, then rose and plunged his head into a basin of cold water, and soon was out in the sweet cool air, striding up the red road that led past the old home. Cupid made John his sport that morning. He led him into the laurel thicket to get rain-jewelled blossoms for Miss Katherine, and there persuaded him to sit on a boulder and think it all over. There John sat when Josephus rode by without seeing him, and there he sat when Portia flashed by like a bird and stopped just beyond him, and his heart had to stand still, and his tongue was tied, and wicked little Cupid's work was done in that same instant. He laughed and perched on the fence at Portia's side, while the birds sang; and she, unheeding his presence, or that of the poor smitten wanderer in the laurel thicket, turned her head this way and that and sang too.

John thought of his dream, the voice that burst upon his ear while he waited in the moonlight and shadow, sounding again in the beautiful early morning, and mingling with the bird-notes in arias and trills. Portia sang anything and everything as she watched the mists rise. She mixed her songs in a joyous medley and invented new caprices, after the manner of the cat-bird in the thicket. John sat on the boulder, his head between his hands, his heart gone. What should he do? Presently she stopped singing, and still sat looking off over the valley lost in thought. Her lips parted with a smile. She was thinking of her caller of the evening before, and wondering a dozen different things about him.

"Good-morning." She started to see him standing before her. "Is this your custom, to do your practising with the birds?"

She leaped from the fence in haste, as he stepped forward to assist her, and laughed while her cheeks reddened. "I got up alone, so I can come down alone," she said. "No, indeed, this is not my custom. It is the event of a lifetime."

"What a fortunate man I am, then, to happen along as I did!"

"No, you are not. The birds put me out. Think of all the instruction I have had, and no one teaches them."

"Singing comes by nature, just as the voice does. You would sing if you had never had any instruction."

"I was thinking of Haydn's 'Creation' as I looked over the valley; think of singing the arias in that

without instruction." She laughed, stooping to gather her arms full of the dogwood blossoms.

"Let me take those for you. You will be wet; they are covered with rain."

"I don't care now; I am wet already, — completely draggled. Why did you come here and catch me in such a plight? I am very particular." They both laughed merrily, neither knew why, but John took the wet sprays from her as they walked on together.

"Now you can hold up your dress," said he. She demurely obeyed.

"I intended trying to see you to-day, at any rate, only not before breakfast," he said after a moment's silence. "I have a great favor to ask. I would make a bold plunge and ask it now, only that I want a good excuse for calling again soon."

"Does it require so much courage?" She glanced up and saw his eyes fixed on her face.

"It does indeed. My mother, her ward, her maids, and trappings are thinking of swooping down on poor little Patterson, to be near me this summer, they say. What shall I do? You see, I must appeal to you for help." Portia smiled, although the color left her face, and then surged back, tinging her neck and ears, and up into the roots of her hair. He saw it, and his heart beat faster.

"In that case it is I who need courage, not you," she said; "when will she be here?"

"I don't know; they may not come at all, but if they do —" he paused, and they both stood still. A great drooping acacia hid them from the house. Portia looked up and met his eyes once more.

"What shall I do?" she asked frankly. "There is no other place."

"Why need there be?" he replied.

"That is so," she said, straightening herself proudly, and striving once more for self-mastery. "Bring them to me certainly, and I will try to make them at least comfortable, and —" she hesitated — "thank you for telling me in time." Her manner had grown cold, but how could he blame her? She could not know what he was repressing. He felt angry with his mother. Why could she not stay away and leave him to woo this fascinating enigma before him unmolested? "She will ruin my hopes," he thought; "she will be cruel if she once suspects."

Portia moved to walk on, but John stood still, holding her flowers, and looking off not to see her motion. He wished to say more, but how? "Miss Van Ostade," he said desperately, "I hope — at least I am sure — you will be kind enough to understand me. I know you would prefer to have almost any one rather than my mother come into your home, but, believe me, you are too sensitive. It is very different from what you imagine. This home was sold long ago; it is yours now, not ours, and you are an angel of mercy in it. Where could I turn in this predicament if you were not here?"

Portia smiled. "Mrs. Marshall may not disappoint me as you did. She may feel all the disgust at the present and longing for the past that I endued you with."

"In that case I will take her away. She shall not stay to annoy you."

Portia looked up in astonishment. His manner of speaking of his mother seemed cold but for his smiling, kindly face. He divined her thoughts. "We are not in the least alike, mother and I, but we understand each other. Now to me it was delightful to see the old home lighted up, and to hear music in the old rooms. All the pretty little modern touches you have added seemed just right. I did not care to have the old time back."

"Ah, but your mother would, although it is kind of you to speak as you do."

"Kind? I can't help it."

"Oh, I think you could. I have thought the situation all over. There are many things you might think if you were not kind enough to think otherwise. Really, I must go back. It is nicer out here, but I am not one of your old-time Southern ladies. I am dependent on my exertions that we may live, — grandfather, mother, and I." He noticed the proud lift of her head as they walked on.

"I am sorry you have thought the situation, as you call it, over so much."

"Why so?"

"I don't know that I want to tell you," he laughed. "Aren't you giving us credit for the same sensitiveness you possess in that way? We may not deserve it."

"In what way?"

"Why, in thinking the situation over, as you say, and deciding what we think, and how we would feel, before you had even seen us. You see, you must have been reckoning from within, out."

"I understand, — judging others by myself. That is wrong, I know, but — "

"I beg your pardon! No, no, not wrong. I only realize that we must suffer by comparison, when you really come to know us."

"Oh, Mr. Marshall, I am not quite so conceited." They had reached the gate.

"What can I say, what can I do, to make you understand me?" he exclaimed.

"Nothing. Forgive me. It was not your intention, I know, to make me out conceited, but I have had reasons outside of myself for my conclusions. People here have tried to be friendly, have been really kind, but I can see plainly enough that I do not answer to their ideas of a lady. To them I am a Northern woman keeping boarders, and working with my own two hands at homely household labor."

Marshall looked down respectfully at her shapely hands as they held her skirts from the wet grass, and straight into her eyes. In that instant a simple telegraphy of mutual understanding passed between them.

"I believe you," he said. "What fools they are!"

"Oh, no! I don't think that. Perhaps if I were one of them, I should think as they do."

"If you were one of them, undoubtedly. Thank Heaven, you are you."

"I must go in." She glanced at the house nervously, and reached for her flowers. "It won't do to be seen looking like this. I have had my run, now I must don my dignity and wear it all day."

She sighed and looked down the road. John smiled a little. She turned quickly and caught the telltale expression before he could cough it away. In that instant she knew he had seen her all the time, and felt that she wanted to get away from him immediately. In that same instant he knew that she knew it, and saw the color flame back into her face.

"Forgive me; I could n't help it," he said penitently, and gave her the flowers. His hand touched hers as she took them; she did not notice it, but he did. Some of the sprays fell on the ground. "Never mind them," she said, turning away hurriedly, but he did mind them, and ran after, adding them to the rest.

"I may call again sometime?" he asked. She hesitated. He looked distressed.

"Indeed, yes, — if you care to — if your — "

"If my mother comes, of course, it will be necessary, but that may not be for some time."

She paused in her rapid walk. He looked at her, and she looked up at the still closed house. Some one began raising a curtain. "We shall be glad to see you," she said.

"Thank you," he replied, and hurried away.

CHAPTER XI

THE EXCURSION

PORTIA sat in her place at the breakfast-table, a full-blown rose among the ferns and dogwood blossoms. The color that came into her cheeks under the arched gateway had not all left. Mr. Russell praised the beauty of the flowers, but looked at her, much to Mr. Ridgeway's annoyance; however, as all the other guests did the same, where was the harm? She was the life and soul of the place, and it was the fashion there to admire her. When it was not done in too personal a manner, her grandfather did not object, but he dearly loved to have her to himself once in a while. She alone could accompany his violin as he liked, and during these days her time was never her own, seldom his; yet she watched over his happiness and her mother's with jealous eyes, and, in a sense, all her devotion to her guests was for them. How else could she make a success of her undertaking, and keep her sweetest of all mothers in that health-giving climate? So she went bravely on planning, under many difficulties, entertainment for her guests. On dull days indoors her musical talent and her grandfather's violin formed a delightful feature. For their excursions, there being no livery in the place, she was obliged to hire from their neighbors horses and rigs which, to say the least, were antiquated.

These days, for John, passed happily and busily. He spent some time in New York and Asheville, making arrangements for the building. Judson Chaplain, a hearty, pleasant-voiced young Carolinian gentleman, was won by Marshall's courteous frankness into enthusiastic partnership. He rejoiced that he need have no dealings with Monk, — who, by the way, was not missed for a time, — and that a telling blow to that individual's plans would be to insure Patterson's superiority over Broadgate, by the erection of a hotel, that would "eclipse anything in the country, suh." To this end the contract was let to first-class builders in New York, who were to bring skilled workmen with them. John, being the architect, acted as superintendent. He was happy in this work. He felt his spirits rise in an exuberance of joyousness as each day passed.

"If I can strike a bargain for a couple of good saddle-horses, will you help me to use them now and then?" he asked of Hanford Clark, one day. "I must have one."

"I doubt if I can get off," said Hanford, absently.

"I shall get two and risk it. It is about time you and I struck up an acquaintance, don't you think?"

They both laughed. "Go slowly, John. Does the time seem long to you?"

"Long? Why should n't it? I would run in twenty times a day for a word with you."

"Don't yet awhile. At least don't appear to be intimate. You see, John," Hanford laid his arm affectionately over his friend's shoulder, "my life

has not been as successful as yours. I have learned to wait."

Marshall looked in his face frankly. "To wait for what?" he said.

Hanford laughed a sober little laugh. "Oh, what you please, — fortune, fame, anything. I did n't set out to become a station agent down here, you know."

"Why have you never married?" asked John, bluntly.

"For lack of money to make a fit home first, and just as that was in reach, lack of health, and then —" he spread out both hands with an almost petulant motion and lifted his shoulders.

"Then what?"

"Another man had stepped in before me." He spoke slowly, without looking at John, who laughed self-consciously, and drummed on the window ledge. They were in Hanford's stuffy little room at Scrapp's.

"Then she may not have been the right one. At any rate, 'There are as good fish in the sea as ever were caught,'" said John, tritely.

Hanford glanced keenly in his friend's face. "To change the subject, when do you expect your mother on?"

"To continue it, you mean. She never travels alone."

"Very well, as you will."

"Own up, Hanford, own up. Even you —"

"You have n't answered my question yet."

"Oh, beg pardon. What was it?"

"When will your mother be here?"

"Ah, yes. My mother, of course! I forget your deep interest in her. In about three weeks, more or less."

"So soon?" said Hanford, but he thought it long to wait.

"Marguerite will only entrap some poor fellow to his ruin for her summer pastime. Woe be to whoever falls into her snares! I shall write mother there is no sense in bringing her out here," said John, mischievously.

"Do so," said Hanford, grimly.

"Too late. My last letter betrayed the fact that I found you here. I half suspect that knowledge is at the bottom of the sudden determination to spend their summer in the mountains."

"Why should your mother care?"

"She would n't."

"Now you are talking nonsense. What do you suppose has become of Monk? I have n't seen him for days."

"I neither know nor care."

"He 's a great fellow to go off now with the election coming on next week. His interests are suffering, I can tell him that."

"Let them suffer. Who cares?" said John, stretching himself leisurely. "Look over that trestle yonder. I have been watching those buzzards sail round and round in one spot ever since we stood here. There, one has lighted away down below on that dead tree."

"Some poor carcass there, no doubt," said Hanford. They both stood watching the ominous birds a moment, each busy with his own thoughts.

"I must go," said Marshall at length. "See here, you have night service to relieve you now, why do you stay on in this hole? Go up to the old place, — Miss Van Ostade's, I mean."

"I think I will." A few days later found him installed at the house, seated at Mr. Ridgeway's right, at table, a valuable addition to the small coterie there.

The next day John made choice of saddle-horses. He was very particular with regard to the extra horse, that it should be suitable for a lady to ride. He whistled softly a measure of one of Portia's songs as he walked away after the bargain was completed. Suddenly a thought struck him. "There are no saddles to be had in Patterson. She can't ride bareback." When the animals were led into the stables at Miss Katherine's, behold, the pretty little chestnut mare, which had been recommended to him as being "gentle as a kitten," was equipped for a lady's use, even to the carved, ivory-handled whip.

John was impatient and restless. He begged Miss Katherine to go with him at once to try them, and as they galloped over the mountain road, the color came into her cheeks and the fire to her eyes. She talked brightly as of old. The old times seemed really coming back to her. When John lifted her from the saddle, he thought she seemed ten years younger. Ah, what a beautifier happiness is! She sang a bit of an old song he had heard her sing years before, as she prepared their simple dinner, stopping every now and then to admonish Gertrude. The child went to and fro, carrying dishes from the kitchen — a separate building a rod away from the

house — to the dining-room. John smiled as he listened to the low, sweet tones and the pleasant clatter.

Mrs. Wells sat at an old-fashioned grand piano and made pretty tinkling music, such as she had made for the colonel in her young ladyhood. John wondered where her thoughts were, as she played over the tripping airs with their rippling accompaniment. A portrait of the colonel, stiff and dignified, hung in the great square room. Her sightless eyes were turned toward it. He saw her through the open French window from where he sat on the piazza, and a suspicious moisture gathered in his eyes. He rose and sauntered down the path, and smelled of Miss Katherine's lilies. "If Donald had only lived!" he thought.

"John, dinnah is on the table," called Miss Katherine from the doorway. "Come, ma."

The meal over, Gertrude brought a pan of hot water, and Katherine washed the few pieces of china and the old silver and glasses herself. "Gertrude is so careless," she said.

Half an hour later John strolled toward the old home, drawn thither by sundry little cords called heart-strings. He had been there before that week, and was trying to think of some adequate excuse for calling again so soon, when a rattling team and a merry whistle caused him to look behind him. The two young planters were driving home from their orchard among the hills.

"Going our way?" said Richard. "I 'd ask you to ride if there was only another seat."

"I am on my way to Mr. Ridgeway's. Thanks."

"I guess we can make room for you up here," said James Craig, hitching along.

"No, no, sit still. I can stand and enjoy the ride," said Marshall. Placing one hand on the rear of the long wagon-box, he leaped lightly in and stood, steadying himself by the shoulders of the two on the high spring seat in front, and they drove on.

"We have a go on hand this evening," said Craig. "We are to seat this wagon with bundles of fodder and cushions, and the crowd are to pile in and drive over to Towanee Gorge. The negroes are having a big time there."

"Heavens! What a dolt!" exclaimed Marshall. "They were kind enough to include me in the party, and it had entirely slipped my memory." Richard laughed, and the wagon rattled on.

Portia stood on the steps, smiling, enthusiastic. The elderly gentleman stood near. Mrs. Van Ostade moved quietly among the guests who were collected on the piazza, with her arms full of wraps.

"You would better take this shawl," she said to Mrs. Clare. "The air seems mild enough now, but later in the evening it may be quite cool."

"Oh, you thoughtful little woman! Thank you."

"Do you think she ought to go?" said Miss Milbourn.

"Indeed she ought, and you too," cried Portia. "Where is your bonnet? I will get it." She disappeared in the house.

"Are n't you going, Mrs. Keller?" said Mr. Betts, drawing on his gloves, alert and ready, with his umbrella under his arm,

"No, I think I will leave all this nonsense to the young folks," she said, glancing at the elderly gentleman.

"What, what!" said he; "it won't do to let them have all the interesting things to themselves. I don't believe in growing old. Keep young, I say."

Mr. and Mrs. Percy came down the long stairway. "Why, Miss Milbourn, are you not going with us?" they asked in a breath.

"Yes," said Mrs. Clare, "Miss Van Ostade has gone for her bonnet."

"I think as I am old, and there will hardly be room for all in the wagon, perhaps —"

"Oh, but the carriage is going," said Portia, returning, "and I have the use of the Gebbs' buggy; two can go in that." She caught the dear old lady, turned her about, and tied the bonnet under her chin. "There! The moon will be up as we come back, and this is the last moonlight evening this month. Now you and grandfather and Mrs. Clare must take the carriage, and Alexander will drive, and you, Mr. Russell" (to the elderly gentleman), "will have to go in the wagon with us, — unless —"

"Can't I drive with you in the Gebbs' buggy? That will leave two extra places in the wagon."

Instantly there was an outcry on all sides. "Oh, no!" "What an idea!"

"We want Miss Van Ostade with us."

Portia felt annoyed, but smiled pleasantly. "You see, Mr. Russell, I can stand the rough wagon ride better than some," she said in a low tone to her discomfited admirer.

Hanford Clark was just coming up one driveway as the wagon rattled up the other. "Here they come," shouted Mr. Betts.

"Ah, Mr. Marshall, so you did not forget about our little excursion," said Portia.

James Craig began arranging the bundles of fodder passed up to him by a negro boy, and placing the cushions for the seats. He glanced up quickly at John and laughed. A serving-maid stood by with her arms full of rugs.

"Forget? Of course he did," said Richard. "Jim and I picked him up down the road and brought him on by main force. Hello, Mr. Clark, glad to see you."

"I was on my way here in spite of Mr. Dutton," said John.

"Now we are ready, are n't we, Mr. Craig?" said Portia. She ran back into the house for something and was detained by Maggie.

"See here," said Dick aside to Mrs. Barry, "Jim and I have a scheme. You hustle them all in, — the carriage load is made up, — and contrive so that Mr. Russell sits with Miss Keller. He 's manœuvring to be left behind to drive in the Gebbs' buggy with Miss Van Ostade, Mr. Betts says. We 'll do it before he knows what 's happened, and start before she gets back."

"Good," exclaimed Mrs. Barry with keen relish, "but who will go with her?"

"Oh, leave her to Mr. Marshall. He won't object, I 'll warrant. Hello! All aboard for Towanee Gorge," he shouted, gathering up the reins. "Jim, where are you?" Craig gravely helped Mrs. Barry

in, then came Mr. and Mrs. Percy. "Get Mr. Russell to follow you," said Mrs. Barry as they settled themselves.

"Come, Mr. Russell," said Mr. Percy. "We need another gentleman next."

"Now Miss Keller," said Craig.

"Where is Miss Van Ostade?" said Mr. Russell, looking about.

"She 'll be here immediately," cried Mrs. Barry, hilariously. "Get in here on this seat with Miss Keller, and Portia can sit on the other side. There is room to sit three on a seat, is n't there, Mr. Craig?"

"Certainly, certainly! Here, Mr. Russell, that 's not fair, to monopolize all the ladies. I ought to have that seat, or Mr. Clark there."

John, conversing with Mrs. Van Ostade, looked on, only half comprehending the badinage.

"No," said Hanford, "you and Mr. Russell decide that between you. I 'll sit at the end with Mr. Betts."

"That 's right, Mr. Russell, climb in, or Mr. Craig will be ahead of you," said Mrs. Barry.

"There, Jim! You 'll have to content yourself with me once more," said Dick. "You 're no match for Mr. Russell."

"Right you are," said Craig. "All aboard."

"Ay, ay," cried Mr. Betts.

"We 're off," said Dick, waving his whip.

"Why, but Mr. Marshall and Miss Van Ostade are neither of them in," said Miss Keller.

"I 'll go for her," said the elderly gentleman, rising. The horses sprang forward at a quiet

little fillip from the whip, and he sat down again quicker than he got up. "Oh, beg pardon," said Richard.

"How now! We are not starting," said Mr. Russell, discomfited. "There she is now," he beckoned frantically.

"Oh, never mind, we shall have to go slower than the carriage, the wagon jolts so, sha'n't we, Mr. Dutton?" said Mrs. Barry, complacently. "The carriage has started, and the buggy is coming for them."

Mr. Russell made one more attempt to stem the tide against him. "But Miss Van Ostade may not like it. I think she is beckoning us to wait."

"No, she is signalling us to go on," said Craig, and they went. As they drove out of one gate, Mr. Gebb's small darky boy entered by the other, driving a little gray mare hitched to a buckboard.

"Is that the buggy?" said Portia, dismayed.

"Yas 'm," said the impassive youngster.

"I ought to have seen it before I engaged it. Why did they start in such a hurry? There would have been room for us in the wagon. This was only intended as a contingency, so to speak."

"Why, what 's the matter with it?" said Marshall, walking around the rude outfit, and pulling a little here and there at the straps of the old harness. "It 's a mighty good sort of a contingency, that 's what I think. Shall we start?"

"I suppose we must, if we make this little gray thing keep up with that team of Mr. Dutton's."

He stepped back and took her wraps, and seeing a thick traveller's rug on the piazza, he arranged it

over her side of the seat for her comfort. She watched him doubtfully.

"That is Mr. Russell's. He must have intended taking it. Perhaps that is what they were stopping at the gate for."

"We will take it to him, then," said John, laughing. Portia sprang lightly in, and he followed, with a delight in the situation not easily disguised.

CHAPTER XII

THE GIRL AT THE GERMAN BRIDGE

"GOOD-BYE, Mrs. Keller. Take good care of mamma," called Portia, as they drove off, tilting up and down with the easy sway of the long buckboard as it passed over uneven places in the road. "This is fun. It makes me think of the days when I played see-saw."

"I call it an improvement on the old plan; the board being hung at both ends instead of in the middle, we can both tilt up and down in the centre. It 's more sociable."

"Oh, dear! The wagon is so far ahead it will be out of sight. Do you know the way? I don't."

"I do, unless the hills have changed places since I was a boy."

Portia drew in a deep breath and looked quietly about her. She loved the mountain air, sweet with the scent of growing things, and the glowing colors in the sky, where the sun seemed sinking into a seething furnace. "Without coming to the mountains and living among them, one never could know how beautiful the world is," she said.

"I have been where the mountains are much grander, in Switzerland, and among the Rockies; but I must say these North Carolina hills have a fascination peculiarly their own."

They were both silent a few minutes, — she calmly happy in these moments of relief from care, and he

intoxicated with a delight he dared not show. At last he broke in upon her quiet reflection.

"It is the strangest thing — I always think of some one I saw only for a moment over in Germany, when I look at you, — it seems as if you must be she."

"That is odd. Was she a German?"

"I don't know."

"If you had said in Holland I would think you might have seen a descendant of some possible Dutch ancestor of mine."

"No, it was in Germany near the Danish boundary. I saw her only a moment, and never since, but I always connect you with the incident."

"Oh! I wonder — " she leaned forward and looked at him with a new light in her eyes. "Please go on."

"What do you wonder? Tell me that first."

"No, I interrupted you, and I can't wait. Was it in Schleswig?"

"Were you ever there?" She laughed. "See here! I want to know if you ever saw me before."

"No," she replied, "I have n't even a vague impression that I ever saw you before or any one like you, until that day in old Clarissa's cabin."

"But you have been abroad?"

"Yes, nearly two years. But please tell me what you were going to."

"But look at me squarely first and tell me if you ever saw me before."

"I have looked at you squarely, and now I tell you roundly I will not answer any more questions

until you go on with what you were going to say when I interrupted you."

They turned a curve and came in sight of the wagon rattling merrily on before. They were greeted by a waving of handkerchiefs, and Portia answered with a gay call.

"Let us keep this far behind them," said John. "It will be pleasanter."

"I would rather. Sometimes I long to be alone. To-night I was tired, and really felt glad they started on as they did."

"And you were not allowed the privilege of being alone, after all. What a pity I could not have known!"

"You know very well I did n't mean that, but if you won't go on and tell me about the girl you saw in Germany, I will say I did."

"No, please. I will tell you anything rather, only I don't believe you would say it even if you thought it."

"Perhaps not, but this I will say, you are cruel to keep me in suspense."

"After all, there is little to tell. I was sketching a quaint old bridge, and bit of river and rock, when a party came toward me from the other side, riding rapidly, and the foremost had passed on, when the horse of one of the ladies began plunging and rearing. He took fright at my umbrella and canvas, or possibly at me. I thought for an instant they would both go over the side of the bridge, but in a moment she had regained the mastery and they dashed on. That is all, but this is the strange part. When I first saw you, that whole scene at the bridge away off

there in Germany flashed into my mind, even the color of her dress and her horse, and the appearance of the two gentlemen of the party who seemed to be her particular escort, all came back to me as if it had occurred yesterday; yet they came and were gone before I could collect my traps and my senses."

"Why, this is like a bit from a novel. I was almost sure you were going to tell that very incident. I have always wondered who the artist was. You were so quick to get your things out of the way, and I never should have gotten control of that horse if you had not caught his bridle and led him by. After the excitement was over I remember feeling that I had not even thanked you."

"I don't remember touching the bridle. Perhaps, after all, your young man was not I, nor my young lady you."

"What was the color of her habit?"

"Green."

"So was mine, and what had she on her head?"

"Nothing. I always wondered why she rode bareheaded."

"Then surely it was I. My horse was badly trained and very nervous. He had acted badly once before, and my hat, one of these horrid high ones, fell off, and he put his foot through it and wore it for an anklet until I could stop him. I wonder my neck was not broken."

"Thank Heaven!" said John to himself.

"Oh, I wish I had not told you how I came to be riding bareheaded in a pleasure party. I should have kept that for a mystery."

"It is a mystery without that. To meet as we did in that instant, and then here, in this out-of-the-way place again, collided as it were, over poor old Mammy Cl'issy, it would seem as if we were fated to — "

"Become acquainted?" she asked, forestalling a more serious conclusion.

"Yes, become acquainted."

"Maybe, but I am not the least bit of a fatalist."

"Decreed by Providence, then?"

"I think things just happen sometimes. I don't believe in attributing every strange thing to occult influence, like saying it is fate, or Providence, you know, that brings about such odd meetings as ours. Do you?"

"Some say there is no such thing as chance."

"I know, but perhaps some are mistaken," she said with a merry glance in his face.

"I hope not," he said gravely.

"Do you think Providence plans every single thing that takes place in this world?"

He laughed. "'There 's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will.' Aunt Mary taught me to believe that."

"Oh, dear! How little we know of what our futures are to bring! Mine is so different from — I presume our plans are nothing but dreams, after all."

"Perhaps you formed your plans too early in life to have them definite." She was silent, and he wondered what they might have been.

They drove down a sharp declivity, and through a small stream that made a pleasant sound in their

ears. The sun was set, and the air had grown cooler. He unfolded her wrap and placed it about her with a gentle thoughtfulness that pleased her. They heard the wagon in the distance rumbling on.

"Shall we hurry a little?" he asked.

"If we are nearly there, no. If not, I suppose we must."

"I 'll let the little nag take her time, then."

"I only meant — it 's pleasanter here than crowded in that little cabin with a lot of negroes. Do those who have been born and brought up among them feel that repugnance to them? Is it a natural feeling? I can be kind to them and like them well enough, and I do truly want to see them improve and become good educated citizens, and all that, and I always feel like taking their part, but I can't bear to have them touch me, poor souls."

"Oh, I don't know. It 's a matter of custom, I guess. I never felt any of it. Take old Clarissa now. I used to cuddle up in her arms and go to sleep, I remember it well; and as for the piccaninnies, they were regular little playmates, and no end of fun."

"How strange! How could you?" Portia shuddered.

"You Northern people never really did the Southerners justice in a way. When it comes right down to plain facts, we like the colored people better than you do. Why, I actually loved that old mammy."

"And there I could n't bear to touch her," said Portia, humbly. "I fear you are right. Of course, we thought slavery horrible, but at heart we were n't much kinder, only a little more just, don't you think?

I 'm not used to them yet. There 's Lucyleese, the maid who brought out the cushions, almost as white as I am, she wanted to dress my hair the other day, when I was tired, and I could not let her. I am sure for myself it is innate repugnance. It can't be education, because I have tried to overcome it, and all my education has been against allowing such a feeling."

"Why should you try to overcome it?"

"Because I think it wrong."

"Please explain. You are worlds higher up in the scale of creation, why should you try to place them on a level with yourself?"

"Perhaps if our standards were other than human ones, some of the blackest of these might rank much higher than I."

Marshall laughed, and leaning forward, stole a quick glance at her face as he touched the horse with the whip. "You have n't told me yet why you fight against your own nature," he said. "I recognize a difference, but I accept it. I no more try to look upon them as other than they are than I would imbue this horse with my attributes, and try to converse with him. To me a horse is a horse, and a negro is a negro, and not a white man."

She turned on him a look of horror. "Why, Mr. Marshall, you believe them human beings with souls like ours, do you not, undying?"

"Certainly; but are all souls the same kind or quality? They are black human beings; we are white ones. There are fundamental differences. Can you expect to overcome a repugnance that the finer, more sensitive nature must feel toward a coarser one?"

Portia looked away, speaking slowly. "What you say seems true, but it does not make me feel right. You see, I feel, after all, that only evil should excite repugnance in one human being toward another, not mere differences in color. The reason should be more than skin deep, — should lie in the heart." Marshall did not answer immediately, and she resumed: "For instance, old Clarissa, just before you came in, was showing me trinkets she had kept with such care because you had given them to her, and telling me about her 'Young Mars'r;' and when you entered at that moment, how her old face lighted up! Can you ever forget that expression? Of what quality is her soul, do you think? Her look at you condemned me. It was heavenly."

"Do you expect me to solve the problem by answering all those questions?" said John, laughing. "I'm afraid we are getting into deep waters."

"What shall we do, sink or swim?" she asked with a responsive laugh.

"Why, swim, of course. We always do."

They relapsed into silence, each thinking his own thoughts. John vaguely wondered who were her companions when he saw her first. Had he set her thinking of some love affair? If she would only speak, and give him a clew to her thoughts, — but no, when she did speak it was only of the present.

"How dark it is growing! How wild it is here! Are these the same roads you used to ride over when you were a boy?"

"The very same, but they were in better repair then."

"People seem to have lost heart here. They all seem so dispirited."

"No wonder! We were so badly used by you Northerners a few years ago."

"You say we. You spent over half your life in the North with us. Do you count yourself one of them?"

"Certainly I do. My father lost his life in the Southern army; how could I help it?" He straightened himself, lifting his head proudly. In the gathering dusk she ventured to look more intently at him, and thought him handsome at that moment.

"Do you wonder I fear your mother's coming when I see how deeply you feel about the past?"

"Ah, but it is past," he answered with a quick smile. "The old animosities are dead and should be buried along with the brave fellows who fought so desperately on both sides. At least, we of the younger generation, who have never fought, should not revive them."

"Yes, you are right. Yet ever since I have lived here I have felt the past hanging over me like a cloud. I have been happy, but it seems to confront me everywhere I turn."

"I see it also, but clouds are never stable. It is only the shadow of the old troubles, — the flying edge of the storm that has passed over. Coming from the North, where all is thrift and enterprise, you may feel the depressed state of affairs more than they do."

"Now you say they, not we. I guess when it comes to the present, you do not feel so much one of them, after all."

"In sympathy I am, in feeling not. They need stirring up down here."

"They need something to look forward to. There is nothing so utterly hopeless as hopelessness. There is a sweet old blind lady I have met. She seems really to enjoy life more than her daughter, for she has all the past in which she lives, while the daughter has more of the hopeless future before her with its loneliness."

"I am there now. They were my father's dearest friends. Will you go with me sometime and sing for Mrs. Wells? Everything done for the mother gives Miss Katherine pleasure. They are really very charming."

"I would love to do it." The deep bay of a hound near by startled her. "I wish men would n't hunt with hounds. It is cruel," she said impetuously.

"This is some hound hunting on his own account, I guess."

"What a weird place we have come to! There, where the shadows are black among the undergrowth, I seem to see figures moving. See, is that a man?"

"Some burnt stump, no doubt. It is a weird place. Are you timid? There is nothing to fear. I have been here hundreds of times."

"I 'm not afraid. I am enjoying the strangeness of it all. I love to be in wild places and imagine dreadful things."

"Imagine your dreadful things quickly, then, while the opportunity lasts. We are almost there." She laughed merrily. "How can you, and laugh like

that? Tell me the horrible things you are imagining, so I may laugh too."

"Where does this interminable road end?"

"Does it seem so long? You are cruel. It is very short. It cuts across the gorge here, and there is a horse trail leading to the cabin which is more interesting. It winds along skirting the stream. I have two saddle-horses now, very good ones, I think. Miss Katherine and I tried them this afternoon. Will you ride with me here sometime?"

"Oh, Mr. Marshall," she said, drawing in a deep breath, "I have been longing for a ride over these hills ever since we have been here."

"Then we will go," he said gladly. Just then lights gleamed out ahead of them, and they came upon the wagon and carriage in a small level space, where the rest of the party were waiting them.

CHAPTER XIII

"W'EN DE GATES LIFT UP DEIR HAIDS"

"HELLO! So you're not lost," said Dick Dutton. "We are to leave the horses here in charge of Alexander and foot it a few rods along the mule-path."

It had grown quite dark, but by the aid of lanterns they made their way merrily along the trail. A group of negroes on ahead were singing as they walked.

"Why do they have their church so far from the village?" asked Mrs. Barry.

"They seem to have a fancy for having them in wild out-of-the-way places," said Marshall. "You may come upon one anywhere among these mountains."

"A negro church, or a moonshine still," said Dick.

The narrow path bordered steep declivities in some places. The flickering light of their lanterns made the darkness visible, and the chasms seem more awful, lending a touch of excitement to the excursion.

"What kind of a gathering is this we are going to?" said Mrs. Percy. "I wish Mr. Held were with us. Could an artist paint such a weird effect as this?"

"They are holding protracted meetings, and having a revival," said Mr. Ridgeway. "Alexander has been off duty every evening this week because of them."

"I have some twinges of conscience," said Miss Milbourn.

"Why so?" said Mr. Russell.

"Going just out of curiosity. It seems not right."

"We're not going like a parcel of bad boys," said Craig. "My conscience is all right."

"How long since?" said Dick.

"Here we are," said Mr. Betts. "Hear them singing?"

"That sounds like a dirge," said Mrs. Clare.

"They seem to be marching," he replied.

The door of the rude cabin stood open, and the light streamed in long rays out into the darkness. Within, black figures could be seen, their bodies swaying, and their feet and in some instances their hands also, keeping time to the singing with a gentle patter. A few negroes hung around outside the door, and others were still coming along the trail. The singing ceased, and the voice of an old man was heard in prayer. The quavering tones rose and fell with a monotonous insistence that seemed to blend with the sounds of the waterfall and the wind among the tree-tops. The cabin, the same in which the political meeting had been held, was lighted by tallow candles stuck in rude improvised candle-sticks, — pieces of wood with holes bored in them, in which the candles were put, — thrust here and there between the chinks of the logs. The visitors waited without

until the prayer ceased. Now and then would be heard a groan or a cry, "Amen, bress de Lawd." These sounds grew more frequent as the prayer progressed.

John stood near Portia. "I presume you have attended these meetings often," she said. "I never did before."

"Indeed, yes. A negro revival was a regular thing. The masters encouraged them. They considered a nigger worth more who had experienced religion."

"How horrible!" she said under her breath.

Marshall, bending toward her, caught the words. "Yes," he said, in a low voice, "I see it now; I did n't then."

Again the bay of a hound awoke the echoes, startling Portia as before. "What a hideous sound!" she said.

"I have heard the blood-hounds bay in the night when they were tracking some runaway nigger, the most unearthly noise you could imagine. This sounds as if it might be one of their descendants."

"Oh, don't let us think of those horrible things here in this wonderful, beautiful spot. I wish I may never hear a hound bay again. I shall always think of what you have just said."

"I thought you liked to think of dreadful things in these wild places."

"Oh, not those that have really happened."

The moon, creeping up over the mountain top, looked like a rim of fire. The prayer ceased, and they entered, seating themselves on the rough benches near the door, which were vacated for

them with prompt courtesy. Portia was glad they did not have to go farther into the close, dimly lighted room. Negroes of all ages filled the cabin in curious variety of motley attire. Josephus' rich tones rolled out in starting the next hymn, followed by Gabriella's high treble, while every voice sounded strong in the chorus.

"Oh, frien's, don' yo' b'leeb me?
Oh, frien's, don' yo' b'leeb me?
Oh, frien's, don' yo' b'leeb me?
Come hyar what Jesus say.

"We 's gwine tu hab a hyarin',
We 's gwine tu hab a hyarin',
We 's gwine tu hab a hyarin',
At de awful jedgemen' day."

The service, a mixture of praying, exhorting, and singing, grew more fervid, and the ejaculations louder and more frequent, as the moments passed, until it became almost impossible to make out what was being said. The leader was one adored by the colored people, and a general favorite among the whites. He never talked politics, but confined himself to his own simple interpretation of the Scriptures, travelling wherever he felt the spirit move, to preach and hold protracted meetings. A picturesque figure he was, tall and spare, with intensely black skin, which looked the more dense owing to his heavy head of snow-white wool. In the dim obscurity of the room he appeared positively uncanny. Now in the midst of the confusion he rose, and there was instant silence. He announced that a contribution would be taken up.

A hymn was sung in rhythmic chant, while the congregation, by twos and threes, walked forward, all singing together, passed in front of the preacher, and laid their money on the table, passing around it and back to their seats in time to the music, in such a manner as to avoid moving in each other's way. In the uncertain light, the grotesque procession seemed to be performing some heathen rite, or witch dance. This ceremony over, two men passed their hats, giving their visitors a chance to be benevolent.

Then old Pauldo, the preacher, holding his worn Bible in his hand, whole chapters of which he could repeat by rote, although he could neither read nor write, gave out his text: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in;" and proceeded to detail the glories of the coming of the Lord. This was his favorite theme.

"Oh, bredren, hol' up yo' han's in pra'r, fo' de King ob g'ory baoun' tu come. He may come in de lightnin' an' de sto'm-claoud, — he may come in de evenin' w'en de sun go daoun yandah 'hine de maount'n, — he may come in de mawnin' w'en de cock crow, — yo' kyan' rightly tell w'en he gwine sen' de angel Gabr'el blow de ho'n, but w'en de Lawd come, de glory gwine come tu. De glory gwine come tu, bredren, an' we-all wha' has kep' de comman's o' de Lawd hyahin spaounded an' splained, wha' I done preachify tu yo' all dese y'ars, is gwine be tuk cl'ar up tu de glory. We 's gwine walk de streets ob gol'." ("Ahmen, bress de Lawd.") "We-all 's gwine be playin' on de gol'

ha'ps, 'n' w'ar'n' de gol' crowns 'n' de white clo'es wha' shine like de moon yandah wid de gre't shinin' light f'om de t'ron' o' de Lamb.

"O bredren, what glory 'll be dar w'en de gates lif' up deir haids, 'n' de Lawd come through, like de shinin' sun, wid de angels follerin' a'ter a-walkin' on de claouds, an' wavin' deir palms, an' swinging deir shinin' gyarments, an' singin', 'Glory Hallelujah fo' de Lawd come daoun.' O bredren, we-all 's gwine be dar tu jine in de song. Oh, de glad h'ahts an' de free han's an' de white skins, like de white angels in heaben."

"We-all 's gwine be dar, Brudder Pauldo," cried a withered old soul, swaying back and forth, with the tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Oh, yas, yas, we 'll be dar. Glory! Glory!"

"De debble gwine be knock daoun, an' chain' on de bottom o' de flo'less pit."

"Whar 'll be de tears den, my bredren 'n' my sistahs? Oh, dey 'll be wipe' away. Whar 'll be de achin' feet an' de heaby h'ahts? Oh, dey 'll be light like de wing ob de bird, like de bol' ob de cotton w'en de pickin' time come." New shouts and cries of "Glory" burst forth. "Hyah what I tells yo'," he said, and all was still again.

"All yo'-uns wha' nebber war convarted, git daoun on yo' knees an' call on de Sperit fo' tu hyar de pra'rs o' de righteous. Ben' de knee, an' bow de haid. Kyan' yo' gib yo'se'fs up tu pra'r? De bressed Jesus done pray tu de Fadah; I done seed 'im. Hyar wha' I tells yo'," he said again as the responses grew fervent. He was going to tell his vision, he always told his vision, and his hearers

always listened with breathless attention, like the children they were, to the oft-told tale.

"I mine de time w'en I wan' mo' 'n a lad like dis 'n' peekin' in de windah yandah" (the faces instantly left the window and appeared at the door). "My mars'r owned a lime kiln an' I war 'bleeged tu mine de kiln all night, — 'case yo' kyan' 'low de fiah bu'n low in de kiln 'daout yo' spile de lime, suah, — I mine de niggahs been hol'n' pertraked meet'n's like we-all been hol'n' heah, an' dar come 'long mighty pow'ful preacher f'om Cha'leston wha' spaoun' de scripter an' tell we-all a heap 'baouts de day ob wrath an' de day ob glory; 'baouts de fiahs ob hell like de bu'nin' fiah in de kiln; 'baouts de streets ob gol' whar de saints walkin' in deir white robes, playin' on deir ha'ps o' gol' an' singin' in de New Jerusalem, an' I hyar all he a-talkin' an' de words he done spoke wid de tongue ob flame, fall on my bad, ha'd h'aht like de spa'ks ob libin' fiah fall on de col' ha'd stone in de lime kiln, w'en we sta'ts up de heat. My bredren, I know'd de Lawd callin' me. I done wait all day fo' de fiah ob de preachah's wo'ds tu bu'n dat ar bad ha'dness aout'n my h'a't, an' I wait all night sitt'n' dar by de kiln, an' I feel de ol' h'a't in me still like de col' ha'd stone.

"Nex' day mars'r le' me off once mo' an' I go 'g'in tu hyah de preachah an' dar he tell haow de Lawd done fas' in de wild'ness. I did n' know wha' no wild'ness war. My mars'r would n' le' me go tu no wild'ness, but I 'lowed I 'd fas' tu, like de Lawd done fas' an' I 'lowed p'raps de h'a't melt daoun wid de fas'n like gol' in de furnace, an' de debble leab go

an' le' me git cl'ar fo' tu go tu glory an' be free in de New Jerusalem. I did n' eat nuff'n' dat day, an' all dat night I sot by de fiah, an' feed de fiah in de kiln, an' dar I call on de Sperit tu set me free, but de debble hol' on like deff, bredren. De debble nebber leab go w'en he gits a fa'r holt. He nebber leab go he's own se'f. I kin tell yo' dat ar de troof. An' dar I set lookin' in de kiln, an' de fiah bu'nin' white hot, an' de stone crumblin', an' dar 'pears like I see — wha' yo' s'posses I see? Bredren, I see de Hebrew chillen in deir shinin' robes like silvah, a-walkin' in de fiah, an' a-trompin' daown de stone like, an' a hol'in' aout deir han's, a-movin' raoun' like dey steppin' some high-toned dance in de fiah, an' den, bredren, I could n' look no mo'. I jes' cry aout like I see kingdom come, an' run daoun in de hollah 'hine de kiln, an' dar I falls on my knees an' call on de Sperit like I nebber gwine draw breff no mo', an' I feel de debble pullin' back an' I cry aout, 'Naw, yo' don'. Yo' gwine leab go dis time.' An' I call on de Sperit 'g'in, an' dar all on a suddent come a bright light streamin' long fo' sun-up, an' de light grow brighter ontwell I kiver up my eyes wid my han's like dis-a-way, an' a'ter a while I look, an' I see, — wha' yo' s'posses I see? I see a tall raoun' post of shinin' light, an' top o' de post like I see a shinin' man leanin' ovah de post an' a-lookin' daoun like dis-a-way, an' at de foot o' de post, on de groun' like, I see 'nudder man like de first, all white shinin' like de bu'nin' fiah in de lime kiln, an' de one dat stan' at de foot kep' a-bowin' daoun, an' a-rosin' up 'g'in an' a-bowin' daoun an' a-rosin' up wid he's two han's hol' up like he a-prayin'. I 'clar', bredren, I

look on dat sight ontwell I fall daoun wid de glory-shinin' cl'ar froo me, an' de debble leab go, an' I feel my h'a't grow all light wid de bu'nin' ob dat white fiah, an' dar I nebber knowed nuffin' no mo' ontwell I hyahed my mammy say, 'Oh, Pauldo, is yo' daid, honey?' I tell yo', bredren, hol' yo' han's up in pra'r tu de Fadah like de bressed Son done pray. I seed 'im; I knows. Dat ar' de bressed 'zample o' de Saviour wha' done died fo' yo'-all, — wha' done save yo'-all f'om de def an' de fiah seven times mo' hottah dan de bu'nin' white fiah in de lime kiln."

During this whole discourse, the cries and groans of agitated spirits constantly begun and suppressed caused a pervading feeling of excitement, extending its influence even to the visitors. When the preacher had nearly reached his close, a crouching figure moved rapidly across the small moonlit space without, and crept like a shadow in at the door, unnoticed by any but Portia. To overcome the emotion which she felt stealing over her as she watched the thrilling gestures and earnest face of the densely black speaker, she had turned and was gazing into the moonlight and stillness without. Like a shadow the figure dropped behind the men and boys gathered at the door, and crawling on all fours stretched himself like a dog beneath one of the benches against the wall, where he lay concealed by the skirts of the women and the legs of the men who sat upon it. Portia could see the whites of his eyes as he peered cautiously out. The same instant several hounds bayed at once in the near distance, and the cowering figure slunk farther back and was lost to sight. Portia felt the cold chills creep over her. She

clutched Marshall's arm, and for a moment could not speak.

Seeing the look on her face, he took the hand with which she had grasped him. "What is it?" he whispered.

"Take me out. Take me away from here."

He drew her hand through his arm, and they stepped out into the moonlight. She trembled, "What is it?" he said again, gently keeping his strong hand over hers as it rested on his arm.

"That creature, the murderer, the one at the mill-bridge. I saw him. He is in there. Oh, they are after him."

"No, no. It must be some—"

"It is. I saw him creep in. See, there are men —there in the shadow of the rocks. Oh, come away. No. Call grandfather, — call him out. Go; I will wait here." He turned at her bidding, but she held him back, for two men had stepped out in the moonlit space. Within the cabin the negroes we reshouting and singing. John grasped the situation, though he knew nothing of her previous fright at the bridge.

"Don't be alarmed; they are after that brute." He drew her with him back into the cabin, and spoke a few hurried words to their companions. At the same instant a low, long-bodied hound, a descendant of the old Southern breed, rushed in at the door, and with furious yelps began tearing at the legs of the poor creature under the bench. Men shouted, women screamed, and the wildest confusion reigned. Some, supposing Satan was turned loose when they saw Pete crawl out, desperately fighting

the dog, fainted where they sat, or leaped up crying, "O Lawd, tu'n 'im out. Chain 'im in de bottom ob de flo'less pit."

The guests, being nearest the door, were the first to escape from the cabin. Josephus, leaping over benches and prostrate forms, came to the poor wretch's assistance, kicking the cur out of the cabin and breaking its leg. It crawled off, dragging the useless limb, to the group of men gathered outside. The guests hurried away. Marshall walked by Portia's side, keeping her arm within his. As Josephus appeared in the doorway, a shot was fired. The dog was quickly avenged. Portia and John, turning, saw him fall face downward.

"It is Josephus," she cried. "Oh, stop them. What shall we do? Speak to them."

"It will do no good. Come." He tried gently to lead her away, wishing to save her anguish, but horror at seeing a man shot down overcame her personal fear. The others, thinking the two young people were immediately in their rear, walked rapidly on toward the wagon.

"Ought we to go back there and help the poor devils?" said Richard, mechanically placing his hand on his hip pocket, as another shot rang in the air.

"We can neither help nor hinder," said Clark, carefully lighting the way for the others to follow.

"That's so," muttered Craig. "There's hell to follow those shots if the negroes resist. The wisest thing is to get these ladies home as soon as possible."

"Where is Portia?" said Mr. Ridgeway.

"She's coming," said Miss Keller, pantingly, stumbling short-breathed in her tight tailor-made

costume, trying to hasten in the uncertain light. Mr. Russell hesitated and turned back. "I saw her just this moment on Mr. Marshall's arm," she continued, and he walked on.

"Here, yu-all stan' aroun' thar 'nd gyard th' cabin," said Patterson, levelling his weapon and firing the second shot as the white-haired old preacher appeared in the door, while Portia's pitiful voice of entreaty died on the air unheard. "We 'll shoot down airy devil 't tries tu run till we git th' one we 'r' a'ter." Josephus staggered to his feet as old Uncle Pauido fell across the threshold with a bullet through his heart.

Portia screamed, and, springing forward, caught Patterson's arm while the weapon still smoked in his hand, before Marshall could get his slower brain ready for action.

"Oh, Mr. Patterson, don't do it again! Don't shoot men down like that."

The touch of her woman's hand softened his chivalrous Southern heart. He spoke to her as tenderly as to a child. Flinging his pistol to one of the other men, he said in a low tone, "Jes' yu gyard th' door, will ye," and led her away from them. "This here looks hard, but it 's jestice, yu see, Miss Van Ostade. It has tu be done, but hit 's no place fo' yu tu be. Whar 's yu' comp'ny?"

"They 're here. Oh, they are gone! Mr. Marshall is here." She looked about and saw him leading Josephus away to keep the poor fellow from being shot at a second time. She drew a sigh of relief, but still kept her trembling hands on Mr. Patterson's arm. In the darkness she saw men

quietly gathering about the cabin. From within the shrieks of the frightened women came out to them, pitiful voices of terror.

"Oh, hear them, Mr. Patterson, — those poor frightened creatures. You seem always so gentle and kind, don't do it again. Hear them."

"I'm mighty cut up 't any lady should be hyar tu-night, 'nd be skeered as yu air. Yu see yu' heart's tetched, but it can't be helped. It's no mo' 'n jestice 'nd se'f-defence." Marshall approached them. "Good-evenin', John. Yu ah this young lady's escort, I take it. Ah yu with us or not?" The question had a menace in it which Marshall wisely ignored. He drew Portia's hand through his arm, speaking lightly, —

"We came to-night, half in frolic. A negro revival is a curious sight to our Northern visitors, you know. What's all the fuss? What's Josephus been doing?"

"Hit's Pete Gunn we're a'ter, 'nd Joe's been hid'n' 'im, I reckon. We'll hev tu clap 'im in irons fer it tu, 'f he don't git hung. When jestice has tu be done, it's mighty hard hold'n' the men back."

"I don't believe Pete's there. I was in the cabin myself and didn't see him."

"Oh, yes, he is," exclaimed Portia, honestly. "I saw him creep in. That was what frightened me so."

"He's thar all right, — psalm-singin' devils; they're hid'n' 'im. We'd ought tu blow up th' cabin 'nd send 'em all tu hell." Josephus, making his way from tree to tree, was lost in the darkness as these few words were spoken. "Whar is that dog now?" said Patterson, peering after him.

"I 'll take Miss Van Ostade to her party, and come back and hunt him up for you." John felt it wisest to placate, falling easily into Patterson's own vernacular, for the sake of the trembling girl at his side. "He 's too badly hurt to do any harm for one while, I reckon."

Portia drew back and laid her hand again on Patterson's arm. "Please, Mr. Patterson,—you seem able to control all the rest,—don't blow up the cabin. It is murder, even if they are black."

Patterson, always tender and gentle to a white woman, looked into her pleading face upturned to his in the moonlight, and felt himself swayed by the quivering lips and trembling touch.

"Young lady, I 'm mighty cut up ovah this. Thar ain't wuth enough in all th' niggah trash on earth tu make up tu ye fer hit. Mind ye, we won't du no mo' killin' fo' yu' sake than we are mortally obleeged tu. Ef 't wan 't foh yu, we might o' blowed up the whole kit. Now yu go with John 'nd git ovah yu' skeer, 'nd we 'll keep 'em still till yu' fairly out o' hyarin'."

"Your heart is kind; please let it rule," she pleaded again. They hastened, stumbling along in the dark ravine. For the second time they had been deserted by their companions. They heard Patterson shout to the negroes penned in the cabin, "Yu haish thar, yu black catterwaulin' catamounts, we 'll talk fa'r when yu pan out th' niggah we 'r' a'ter."

CHAPTER XIV

THE DRIVE HOME

MARSHALL peered among the shadows for Josephus. He had told him to watch for them down the trail. He still had Portia's hand grasped in his. "I can't let go of you on this rough path," he said. She was glad, although she felt her cheeks glow in the darkness. She was frightened and weak after the first excitement, and the touch of his hand was strong and warm.

"I wonder at their leaving us here with no light," she said.

"We can see very well where the moonlight falls. You are too courageous to care. You were the only brave one among us."

"I am cowardly. I am trembling yet for fear I shall hear shots again. I wish they would quiet those horrible dogs. Hear them!"

"Don't think of it, — you have done all you can."

They came to a wide ledge of rock. "Stop here and rest a moment. We shall be missed soon, and some one will come back for us."

Far below them sounded the water rushing among the rocks. The moonlight filtered over them through the leafage. He saw her face, white in its silvery light. He still held her hand, loath to resign it. "Lean on my arm and rest a moment," he said.

"No, I am not tired, only — oh, hear that!" A shriek rent the air, followed by scream after scream, the howling of dogs and the hoarse cries of men's voices. Portia felt her knees giving way under her. She clutched at John's coat, frantic with horror, thinking of the negroes penned in the cabin, and sank down on her knees at his feet with her hands over her face. Marshall stooped and raised her gently and tried to lead her on.

"Come, you must not stay here another moment. Don't take it to heart so. It is not as bad as it sounds. They are only frightened. There is no shooting."

"No, no. Go to them. Go back. You can stop them."

"I can't leave you here alone; it would be villany. I am powerless. They don't care for me."

"Oh, they will. Try, try to stop them. Oh, hear! I will go with you."

"I will not let you go to be mixed up with that crazy crowd," he said firmly. "Come." Could he have done so, he would have carried her away bodily.

"I am only one. Do you think one soul of more worth than all those helpless creatures? I am not afraid, I tell you. Go back and try. I shall detest you else." In her frenzy she did not know her own vehemence. She stamped her foot. Placing both hands on his breast, she pushed him from her. He turned away.

"God forgive me if any harm comes to you," he said in a tone that reached her heart through all her excitement and brought her to herself once more.

"What have I done, what have I done?" she said, sinking down on her knees again and trying to stop her ears with her fingers. "Everything is wrong."

John ran in the darkness, stumbling, falling, and running again, in his haste to accomplish his errand, and return. At the scene he found quiet restored, while the men parleyed for the prisoner. The negroes would have willingly given him up, but he had escaped them, having crept up the chimney. The screams had arisen from fright. The invaders had piled brush about the cabin, and threatened to burn it down while they guarded the door with their rifles unless Pete could be produced. The dead preacher still lay across the threshold.

Marshall stirred among the men, and sought out Patterson, but finding he had been drinking, realized the futility of argument and his own helplessness, and once more hurried along the trail to regain Portia's side. As he neared the flat rock he saw lights twinkling among the shadows. She had been missed by the party, and Craig had returned for them with a lantern. John, hurrying on, stumbled over something across the path. It was Josephus, lying faint from loss of blood. Marshall ran on for the light, and with Craig's assistance they roused him. Then, while Portia held the lantern, they stanched the bleeding and bound the wound, using all their handkerchiefs and tearing his shirt sleeve in strips to bind them. The ball had passed through the fleshy part of his arm, and glancing had lodged in his breast.

"I wish I had a drop of old Toplins' stuff now," said Craig. "Got any whiskey, Joe?"

"Naw, sah," he said weakly.

"We can never get him to the wagon in this state," said John.

"Here," said Portia, diving her hand into her pocket and drawing out a delicate little filigree smelling bottle. "Will this be of any service?"

"Just the thing. Here, Joe, take a sniff. That's a man. Can you stand?" said Craig.

"I reckon, sah."

"Then we 'll hurry," said Marshall. "They may be after him if we don't make haste." Josephus straightened himself with a quick start, and they moved on.

"That last remark seems to be of more service than your smelling bottle," said Craig. They walked slowly and silently. Reaching the anxious, waiting crowd at last, they were greeted with excited exclamations and questions.

"What was the trouble?" "What were those men after?" "Why did n't you come along with us?" "We have had such a fright about you!"

"Portia," said Mrs. Percy, "where on earth were you? We supposed you were on ahead, — you were the first to leave the cabin. Your grandfather has been frantic."

"Why, I was all right," said Portia, turning to her grandfather, and anxious to avoid questions. "Mr. Marshall was with me. But now what shall we do with this poor fellow?"

"Alexander might take him home in the carriage," replied her grandfather. "If the ladies could —"

"We can ride in the wagon; of course we can," cried they.

"You would better be a little careful what you do, or rather how you do it," said Mr. Clark. "You don't want the whole community down on you."

"Here," said Mr. Percy, "I can arrange that. You who live here, get yourselves home. You need know nothing about it. Loan Mr. Betts and me the carriage, and Alexander, and the rest of you pile in the wagon and drive on."

"Mr. Percy is right," said Mr. Betts. "I will go with him gladly." The rest of the party hastily seated themselves in the wagon without ceremony, where room was easily found for one more.

"Mr. Russell, we brought your rug," said Portia. "Was that what you were beckoning for at the gate?"

"No, Miss Van Ostade, it was for you — I — we — that is — I wanted you to ride with us, but somehow we seemed to get started without you. Please keep the rug — and — "

"Oh, we don't need it, thank you," said Portia, and hastened to take her place in the buckboard, lest she be urged to go with the rest. They started, and she drew a long sigh of relief. Looking back in the darkness, she dimly saw Josephus being helped into the carriage.

"Poor fellow! How old Clarissa will feel!" she said.

"She'll take on terribly, but she may be thankful it was no worse. A little more and that ball would have reached his heart." Portia shuddered. "It was kind of you, and courageous too, to ride back with me." He wished to change the subject, and spoke the thought uppermost in his mind.

"Why so? Oh, because you thought me afraid when we drove along here? I was only indulging my imagination then, but — I do believe I saw those men prowling along in the underbrush."

"I have no doubt you did; and very few women would be as brave." He looked in her face. He thought she would not know the look his eyes had for her in the darkness, but she vaguely felt it.

She drooped her head. "I am not courageous, only cowardly. I should have had to answer all their questions, you know, so I avoided them. Curiosity seems to me sometimes horrible," she shuddered.

"Of course they will want to know why we stayed and what happened when we get home, but I will tell them all, and you must go directly to your room."

A little wave of grateful feeling swept through her heart. Ah, he was making a place for himself there, surely, surely, with the delicate tact which comes by nature to some men, and which others stumble through a whole lifetime without.

"I wish I knew —" she began and stopped.

"What do you wish you knew?"

"I do and I don't. I *am* cowardly. I wish I knew what is happening, yet I would not dare," she covered her eyes with her hands as if to keep out the sight. "It was awful to see them shoot men down. And that good old preacher, so earnest! He looked like a spirit with those gleaming eyes, and his white head, preaching there in the dim light."

"Don't think of it any more. He died at his post, like a soldier on the field of battle." She still

kept her hands over her face. "Think of something else," he said gently. "Are you aware what a perfect night this is?"

"Yes, yes, I am. When the world all around them is so beautiful, how can people be so wicked! It is sentimental bosh that the beauty of nature has a softening effect."

"All souls are not awakened, you know," he was glad to lead her thoughts away through the channel of argument. "They are not sensitive to beauty."

"But Mr. Patterson seems sensitive, — how anxious he was that I should not suffer, even when he was so cruel to them." She shivered.

"Where is your shawl?"

"Here in my lap. I do not need it."

"You must let me put it around you nevertheless. Don't you know that people take cold more easily after excitement?" He placed it comfortably over her shoulders, but his hand shook a little as he gathered it together under her sweet chin. "There! Now I shall feel more comfortable even if you don't," he said with a laugh. And well he might, had he known how surely, unknown even to herself, he was folding himself in with that fleecy white wrap.

"Thank you. I wish we were at home. I wish we had never come out this evening. It seems a sacrilegious thing to look back at now."

He would try argument again. "I begin to think you misunderstand yourself," he said. "Where was all that feeling of aversion when you were pitying them? Own up. Didn't you forget they were all negroes, and feel just the same as if they were white?"

"Oh, no, no! I didn't, I didn't. I caught myself feeling thankful that they were not white people. Oh, why do you make me own up? I didn't. Oh, the shame of it! I prayed to be forgiven, there while I waited for you to come back, and the next moment I caught myself feeling the same again; and in the cabin, I felt as if I could not stay crowded in with them. I presume if I am ever good enough to go to heaven I shall find them there, and they will forgive me."

John laughed a contagious, irresistible laugh. The great rocks hemming them in on either side took it up in merry echoes. The stream they were fording seemed to repeat the sounds; and the wagon rattled on before.

Portia looked at him gravely. "Why do you laugh?" she said.

"Forgive me," he replied. "Won't you laugh a little? Is it so serious a matter that you feel yourself different, set apart from these people? I can't imagine your feeling any other way."

"Perhaps I couldn't, but my white skin is no credit to me. I might have been one of them."

"But since you were given a white skin, you cannot be blamed for having white tastes."

She was silent. He wished she would talk again, and flicked at the gray horse impatiently, making him take a livelier pace. What could he say? Would she ever talk with him again with the light-heartedness and laughter that she did a couple of hours ago? The moon, riding high in its course, hung over the hills, a glowing, molten ball, and threw its rays in Portia's face, giving her spirituelle

countenance a white, evanescent look, as if she were intangible, and would presently fade from his side, and become part of the quivering light. He felt a frantic desire to lay hands on her and detain her by force. The tenderness so lately come into his heart kept his tongue tied, lest he betray himself and say that which would only keep her from him. He framed one thought after another in set words, but they died on his lips unuttered. He, the quick-witted, the ready-tongued, was silent. This travelled, educated, well-poised, light-hearted winner of friends was floundering in a chaos of unuttered, unutterable thoughts and feelings, because the little god of love had followed him into these wilds and shot an arrow into his heart and then laid his finger on his lips. Ah, well! Let him triumph over our hero. Have not all the greatest heroes of the world bowed before him — done him homage? Nay, more. Has he not even created heroes out of common souls, this masterful little god?

Soon they were within hearing distance of the voices from the wagon. Then Portia roused herself as from a dream in which his presence had been forgotten.

"Why, we must be nearly home."

"I think so," he replied, checking the swinging pace into which his impatience had urged the little gray, with a quick movement of regret.

Portia sighed. "What can I do, what shall I do, to rid myself of the remembrance of this evening?"

"Don't think of it; don't. Why should you?"

"Because it is there, and will stay by me as another awful scene has. Only that was simply awful, — this was wicked."

John made no reply, and she looked away at the great ball of fire rolling over the mountain's crest. "Look at the moon. I never saw it so wonderful. Now these dead pines are making black marks over its face. It is like this evening, — beautiful, and then defaced."

"Not forever," he said with a smile. "We shall soon pass the pines, and then — "

"I know what you mean, — but now, — at this very minute, — we cannot know what they may be doing back there."

"It would do no good if we did. They have the law in their own hands just now, and there is a measure of justice in it, on the whole. They wished to retake that nigger that has been murdering and thieving about the country. They can't allow him to run at large, and some of them had been concealing him."

Portia suddenly bowed her head, and covered her face. "Mr. Marshall," she said, in an awe-struck voice, "I am to blame for this evening's awful work. I am to blame."

"What an unheard of idea! Your brave intercession saved matters from being worse; you can have that for your satisfaction."

"I can't. Wait till you understand. I must tell you. You will blame me, but you will help me — tell me what to do?" She told him rapidly of her fright and of her yielding to the entreaties of Josephus next morning to say nothing. "Now you see

how I am to blame. If I had not yielded — if he had been taken — this would not have happened. We are weak and foolish, we women. In trying to be charitable, we overstep the mark. In my misplaced pity, I have done this terrible thing," she moaned.

John was silent, and Portia's heart thumped irregularly during the pause. She grew cold with anxiety and drew her shawl closer about her. Her mouth became dry. She opened her lips to speak, but said nothing. He leaned over and tucked the robes gently about her.

"You are cold," he said.

"Oh, Mr. Marshall, help me. Blame me if you will, you can't help it — but — "

"No, Miss Van Ostade, I do not blame you. You acted nobly, doing the best you knew. It is a comfort sometimes to think we are not such important factors in the affairs of this world as we think we are. If you had stayed in the North, do you think this thing would not have happened? It was bound to happen."

"Would I not better have spoken, though?" she asked, slightly comforted.

"We can't tell; Josephus may have been right. He's a good sensible fellow for a nigger. There is something behind all this," he added hurriedly as they were nearing the house. "I shall question Patterson and learn what I can; in the mean time, say nothing about your adventure, I beg of you. It won't do to have that get about. If I may, I will drop in to-morrow with any news I have been able to pick up."

"Oh, will you? I won't worry grandfather, or mamma, but I had to tell some one my anxiety, — it was too dreadful to keep."

"Won't you dismiss it now, at least until you hear from me again?"

"I will try, — and — and thank you." She gave him her hand gratefully and then hurried up the stairs with her guests. The small darky drove the gray home, and John stood talking affairs over with Hanford Clark a few moments, and then walked slowly back to Miss Katherine's.

CHAPTER XV

"WHY N'T YO' SHOOT TURRER MULE?"

THE morning dawned dull and drizzly. The sun looked out on the world with one brilliant smile and then crept behind the heavy clouds that hung over the mountains, as if the sight of the grewsome thing dangling, hacked and bruised, from the great gum-tree beside the cabin in the gorge, had caused him to hide his head in very shame. The linnets and finches fluttered restlessly from tree to tree, round and round the old gum as if they constituted an investigating committee; while the rain fell softly on the earth, pattering over green leaves, and dripping alike from the soiled rags of Pete Gunn and the laurel blossoms in the thicket; washing the blood stains from the threshold of the log church, and bathing the face of the old preacher who had fallen there when he went where he might watch the "gates lift up their heads to let the King of glory through."

It was election day. All was peaceful in the little village. The white voters congregated at the polls in Budd's saloon, and about the post-office and depot. There was much quiet discussion and considerable drinking. Hanford Clark was pumped cunningly about the views taken at the new boarding-house concerning the raid on the cabin, but he evaded the talk, and questioned in turn as to the

probable cause of Monk's prolonged absence at this time.

"What does he mean by staying away?" he asked. He sat with his back to the group of loungers, and his hand on the button of the telegraph machine on his desk, while it ticked monotonously on.

"Skeered, I reckon," said Patterson, with a half-smile. His eyes gleamed with a peculiar light as they rested on Hanford's face.

"Yas, he's skeered fas' enough," said another; "them smooth, cheeky kind is mighty big cowards."

"Afraid? I guess not. What's he afraid of?"

The last speaker thrust his tongue in his cheek, and Patterson turned away.

"Hello! Wait a minute. Here's a message for him. Don't any of you know where he is?" A languid interest awoke in the crowd, and the machine ticked on. "He's wanted down in Broadgate."

"I reckon they du, 'long 'bout this time," said one.

"Let 'em want 'im, durn 'em; I ain't hunt'n' candidates fer 'em."

"Ef they can't hang on tu their durned, slippery candidates, let 'em hunt 'em up themselves."

They dispersed, and Hanford was left to his own meditations. He decided, unless pressed to do so by some hostility, not to bring up the subject again. Judson Chaplain was elected to the office Monk had hoped to win, quite to the satisfaction of the Patterson element.

No negroes attempted to go to the polls. Josephus lay groaning in his cabin loft, while a few of

their bravest gathered quietly at the scene of the last night's trial by lynch law, and cared for their dead unmolested. The body of the old preacher was committed to the keeping of the hillside where they had laid their beloved teacher, Miss Mann, and Pete Gunn was buried in the gorge. The coroner's jury "sat on them," and found the cause of the death of one to be hanging, and of the other accidental shooting, and there was an end of the matter, so said the voters; possibly the old preacher knew better, — who can tell?

During the morning John visited his old nurse. She came hobbling to the door to meet him. "I knowed yo' 'd come, honey, — we 's in a heap o' trouble."

He heard Josephus groaning overhead, and his heart filled with pity for the old woman who had carried him in her arms and nursed him. She sat down by the hearth and gazed into the embers (as if she saw into another time and place), with an expression of hopeless sorrow on her face.

"Don't take on, mammy. Joe shall be taken care of. Is he badly hurt?"

"I do' know, honey. He nuvva say nuffin', — jes' clum up yandah in de night 'daout wakin' me, an' dar he a-lyin'. Oh, Lawd! I kyan' git up dar fo' tu he'p 'im. I done holla up is he hu'ted, an' he tol' me. Oh, honey, de Lawd done po'in' aout de vials o' he's wrath on yo' ol' mammy."

"No, mammy, no," said John, comfortingly; "the Lord is n't angry with you. That is n't the trouble."

He climbed the ladder to Joe's loft and found the poor fellow delirious from thirst and exhausted

from loss of blood. He brought him water and food, and as he moved over the creaking boards he could hear Clarissa's voice in a low monotone praying the Lord to "punish he's ol' mudder an' leab de boy 'lone." "She's crazy with her trouble," he thought. "What earthly thing does she think she is being punished for?" She stood at the foot of the ladder as he came down and laid a trembling hand on his arm.

"I 'clar' yo' dat like yo' paw, I kyan' look on yo' face 'daout my hea't go jump like hit baoun' tu cry aout. Oh, honey, honey, don't come heah no mo'. Ef yo' come heah, dey 'll hu't yo' some way mo' 'n likely. Dar's de curse o' de Lawd on yo' ol' mammy, honey; yo' kyan' he'p none. Dar's Joe been talkin' he's fool talk wid de niggahs 'baouts de votin'. Dat ar hu-come dey kill de mule, an' now dey like tu kill Joe tu. Go yo' way, honey. Leab yo' ol' mammy b'ar de trouble like she done b'ar heap o' trouble yo' do' know nuffin' 'baout. I kyan' hab no ha'm fall on yo' haid."

"You stop fretting, mammy. I'm all right. I'll send a boy to look after Joe, and a doctor to fix him up again, and he'll be as good as new."

"No doctah won' come heah, mine yo' dat. Yo' sen' de boy, an' I'll sen' up de maount'n fo' Jake Hat'away. He knows a heap 'baouts yarbs 'nd doctorin'. Dey'll trick yo' some way ef dey larns yo' been heah."

"No, they won't, mammy. Joe's too badly hurt to be fooled with. Don't you let any herb doctor come near him. I'll send a good man from Asheville, a Northern man, to doctor Joe, and you must

do everything he tells you to. Don't let any one meddle with him. Hear?"

Later in the day Portia came to see her. Not daring to take her usual walk, she had Alexander drive, and Mrs. Percy and the children accompanied her. Arrived at the stream with the tree for a foot bridge, Alexander suggested that the children go hunt for "posies." "Dis heah 's mighty fine place fo' posies," he said. "Ef anybody come erlong dis-a-way, I gwine tell 'em de bo'din'-haouse folkses hunt'n' posies."

It had not occurred to Portia that there was any reason why she should not look after Josephus in common humanity. Now she realized that the old coachman was wishing to save her from criticism by not allowing the boarding-house equipage to be seen standing near the cabin, so she took the delicacies she had brought and walked on alone. It was too wet for posy hunting, and they all sat in the carriage until her return.

Portia found the old woman crouching over the coals and talking to herself, while Josephus moaned overhead.

"Why, Clarissa! You must have some one here who can go up and look after him," said Portia.

"Yas, Miss Po'tia; young Mars'r John say he gwine sen' a boy tek keer on 'im."

"And a doctor, — is n't there any doctor you can get?"

"I do' know, Miss Po'tia, Mars'r John say he gwine sen' doctor f'om Asheville."

"How good of him!" said Portia, gratefully. It was as if he had done her an especial favor by

coming up to her ideal of him instead of falling below it. "Of course he would look after her, poor old creature," she said to herself as she hurried back to the carriage in the dampness.

During the afternoon two white men came to the cabin and inquired for Josephus. One of them pulled a pair of handcuffs from his pocket as Clarissa pointed up the ladder without speaking, in answer to their questions. They climbed up and found the wounded man lying in a half-stupor, moaning and talking incoherently.

"Why n't yo' tek 'im 'long?" said the old woman, bitterly, as they mounted their horses to ride away without him. "Likely yo' has use fo' 'im. He 's good tu hang yit, ef he is half daid."

"He 'll die fo' mo'nin'. We hev no use fo' a dead niggah," said one.

"Yas, we hev mo' use fo' a dead niggah 'n we hev fo' a live one," said the other.

"Yo' has heap o' use fo' a daid niggah dese days. I done seed de time yo' willin' tu gib a heap fo' a right smaht live niggah like Joe war," she continued to call after them. "I done seed de time yo 'd hunt fo' 'em like dey been made o' cl'ar gol', ef dey git fo' tu run away. Live niggah wuth a heap dem days. Why n't yo' shoot turrer mule? Hit a right smaht mule fo' shootin'."

She went muttering back into the cabin, and replenishing the fire sat down before it as was her wont, gazing into the burning fragments as if she read there the history of her race.

"Hit sarved Joe like he 'd ought tu be sarved fo' hid'n' a murderin', thievin' niggah," said one of the men.

"They 'll know whar they b'long after this, I reckon. A little skeer won't du 'em any harm," was the reply.

"Goin' round by th' mill?"

"Wal, yes. I reckon I will."

"I 'm thinkin' I 'll go thet road tu." They turned their horses' heads in the direction of Throop's mill and rode out of sight.

During that day the cowed negroes scarcely stirred out of their cabins, but after the darkness had fairly covered the hills Gabriella Gunn left her home, and taking a crosscut over a steep rise and through a cotton patch, and a bit of pine woods, reached the small clearing belonging to Josephus and his mother.

"I 'lowed yo' 'd drap in," said Clarissa, as her visitor took a roll of butter and four new-laid eggs out of a cloth in which she had tied them. The doctor had come and gone, leaving Josephus more comfortable, and bringing the boy with him John had promised to send.

Long into the night the two women sat by the fire and talked. "I tol' Joe quit talkin' 'bouts de votin'; I tol' 'im leab dat ar tu de white folkses. Niggahs ain' no use fo' a votin' papah, nohow." They talked in low tones while Gabriella told of the raid in all its details, over and over, while her companion questioned and smoked.

"I 's seed a heap o' ha'd times," said the old woman at last; "but ef Joe dies, hit'll be de wust knock yit."

CHAPTER XVI

"OL' MISSUS' RETURN"

AFFAIRS in Patterson soon settled to their even tenor. Considerable stir was made in Broadgate over Monk's mysterious disappearance, until it was accepted that he had taken himself off for reasons of his own, when his room was broken open and his effects sent to relatives in the North, none of whom seemed to care enough for him to inquire into the matter. His apartments were re-rented to John and Judson Chaplain for offices, and no suspicion of foul play occurred to any but Hanford Clark. John was too much taken up with his building and his love for Portia to care what such a man as Monk did with himself. He laughed at his friend's suggestion, and took him over the hotel's foundations with pride, showing the rapid progress, and talked of his plans with a light heart.

"I must have Aunt Mary and Uncle Darius here to the house-warming," he said. "The place is booming. Some New York party is going to put up a residence over yonder, — I saw the man yesterday." He confided everything except the one matter too deep and too sacred to be touched upon, and, withal, too uncertain. "Come over to the office and look at the plans," he said. "I am going to stay until the mail comes in;" and they crossed the railroad tracks and the main street of

Patterson to Monk's old rooms, all unconscious of the fate of its late occupant, intent only on their own purposes and cares.

"We must have a new station. This little hole will not be in keeping with the place when the hotel is done," said John.

"A stone one like your foundation there. It would change the whole aspect of the place."

Judson Chaplain entered with easy saunter, and seated himself with them. "What 's up? Looking ovah the plans, Mr. Clark? Mighty imposing front, that. Those galleries running all around three sides are a fine thing. John knows what is wanted heah, — plenty of shade, and plenty of this mountain air. That 's what people come here foh, and that 's what we 're going tu give them. The whole thing is in true, hospitable Southern style. Look at this hall and stairway, — theah 's sweep foh yu."

"You are to have a building any town might be proud of. I see it," replied Clark.

"We ought to have a better station," said John.

"I reckon we ought. Let 's see, is n't youah uncle interested in the road?"

"To some extent, yes. I 'll draw up some plans and send on and learn what he thinks of it, and then we can submit them to the company." They all walked out again to look over the ground.

"This space will have tu be widened considerable," said Jud.

"What will you do with that hole?" asked Clark, pointing to a place where stone had been quarried for the foundation, leaving an unsightly spot.

"Ask Jud. He looks after the grounds; I only manage the building."

"Theah? Oh, I 'll turn that into a grotto, and have it lined with ferns, and a grass plat in front. Capital place, — sightly, tu. I sha'n't du much grading; the natural slope of the land 's best theah." Judson spoke with the gentle Southern drawl, but he had any amount of energy, merely requiring opportunity for its exercise. His fine artistic sense was only hampered by his purse. He had conceived a sincere liking for John, and enthusiastically seconded all his schemes.

The evening mail thundered over the trestle below Patterson, and they sauntered down to the station. Just at that moment a bright face was looking out of a window of one of the coaches, down into the gorge from the dizzy height, and off over the hills, which towered range above range, and lost themselves in the glory of the sunlight of the west.

"Aunt Isabel, look. Do look! This is as lovely as Switzerland," she said to her companion. "Look down. Is n't it awful? What if the train should go over here!"

"I have no wish to look down, nor to think of the train's going over," said the aunt. "Clare, bring me a wrap. I am chilly. I wonder if I am to suffer with the cold all the time, now we are here."

A slight young woman seated across from them rose and wrapped a soft downy something about the old lady, who shivered, although she was already well "happed," as the Scotch would say, in fur and

lace. Her white, wizened, finely cut face, with its preternaturally bright eyes, looked, in the cloud of costly, filmy stuff surrounding it, strangely spirit-like, — alert and keen, but scarcely flesh and blood.

"Oh, no, you won't. John wrote that the days are so warm now, even you would not complain."

"Whatever possessed you to insist on starting this week? We shall be here without a word of warning, and nowhere to go."

"He knew we were coming weeks ago. He never would put off making arrangements for us until now; besides, I did write."

"There will be nothing for you to do, now you are here."

"I don't care. I hope he has n't received the letter; it will be such fun to see all he is up to before he knows we are here. There goes the whistle! and not a sign of a place. Is n't this awful, going around this curve? Look down, Clare; it will make you shiver. Oh, there goes my hat!"

"Marguerite, you act like a boy just out of school."

"But my hat is gone. The wind took it right off my head. My nice long hat-pin, too. Clare, can't you get out that little French cap? Quick, — there goes the whistle again. Oh, Clare, hurry. I can't arrive bareheaded, — that little red velvet one, with the wing, — oh, thank you."

"Your hair is coming down," said the maid.

"I know. Pin it up, quick. Oh, dear! how I must look!" She turned her head this way and

that to see in the little mirror over the seat. Ah, she was far more bewitching in the French cap, the rogue!

"What difference will it make how you look? There will be no one you care for in this out-of-the-way place."

"You have taught me, Aunt Isabel, always to be ready for emergencies. Don't you remember the time we got into a diligence in Italy, where there was a princess in disguise? Now I call that a lesson to one to be careful. There may be a prince here, for all we know."

The train puffed slowly up the grade, gave a little spurt of impatient haste at the top, and came to a standstill.

"Clare, you may take my wrap. I sha'n't need it while we are moving about. Where is my little black bag?"

"Here, madam; it is quite safe. I have all safe."

"I don't wish my jacket, Clare," said Marguerite, rushing out on the platform, while her aunt followed more slowly; the maid, and the porter, well laden with bundles and luggage, bringing up the rear.

"How sweet the air is! Aunt Isabel, take a good long breath."

"Where shall we find John, I wonder?"

"Right here, mother," said he, taking the little woman in his arms. "Why, you drop down on one like a —"

"Oh, didn't you get my letter?" Marguerite put up her mouth for a kiss. "There! It is good to see you again." She glanced through the little

window of the station as she spoke, and caught a glimpse of Hanford's profile. He did not look toward the platform, and she did not glance that way again.

"Now, John, where are we to go?" asked his mother.

"What an odd little place!" said Marguerite. "Everything else is lovely. What did they have a place here for at all, if they must have it so ugly? I should think you would die here, John; why don't you?"

"Why don't I? It is so easy to live here with no one to tease me!"

"I have improved, John, since you have been away." They were walking toward the boarding-house equipage as they talked.

"I am going to send you out to Mr. Ridgeway's, mother. He lives at the old place; I think I wrote you."

"Send us? Why, where are you stopping?"

"Mrs. Wells had pity on me, and took me in when I first came; but you will be far more comfortable at the boarding-house."

"What a desperately squalid little place! Why have they dumped all these buildings here? It was far prettier as it used to be."

"Ah, but you don't see the possibilities of it. This is the nucleus of one of the most thriving little towns anywhere to be found. Wait till you see the hotel I am putting up. Look over there, — that rough stone is the beginning."

"Are we to ride in this? Why, there is Alexander. I wonder he is alive yet."

Marguerite laughed merrily. "Why, Aunt Isabel? You are alive yet, — did n't he belong to you?"

The old lady scrutinized him through her glasses. "He looks withered and old," she said, not realizing that she also had undergone somewhat the same transforming change. He turned with a start at the sound of her voice.

"Howdy, Alexander," she said; and he sprang from his seat and was obsequiously bowing ere he could overcome his surprise and agitation.

"Howdy, ma'm, howdy? I am right glad tu see yo' ah return' again once mo' tu yo' fo'mer home an' habitation."

"That is very well, Alexander, very well, indeed; and now you may take us to it right smart, too. Come, Marguerite, what are you waiting for?" The sun cast a warm glow over the girl's face. She was looking at the box-like little station. Hanford Clark had not left his post.

"What an ugly hole of a station!" she said.

John stowed them away in the ample carriage. "Now, Alexander, drive slowly. You don't want to pitch your old mistress over one of these steep places, you know."

"Naw, sah, naw, sah, I do' wan' du dat, sart'n suah, sah."

"Oh, John! Are n't you going with us?" said Marguerite.

"I will ride on ahead. I did n't get your letter, you know. It will be better to notify them;" and with a wave of his hand he was off.

"What a beautiful saddle-horse! Aunty, look."

Over the hill and down, up another rise and down, through the clear stream up to his horse's knees in water, up the next rise, round the curve, up still higher, down and up again, and on, John galloped like a courier riding with haste. He drew in the spicy air with a sense of exhilaration and delight, though trepidation was knocking at his heart. The small pebbles flew, spattering in the fountain as he passed it, and a little darky boy stepped out from somewhere and took the horse's bridle, just as might have happened in the old days. Portia had a clever way of bringing things to pass. She had trained several of the rising generation into typical house servants, and held sway over them with a power that only natures at once strong and kindly can wield.

"That 's right. Hold him till I come, Andy. Where 's your mistress?"

"Miz Po'tia yandah in de drawin'-room, sah." Andy rolled his eyes in the direction of the house.

John flew up the steps. What if she should not be alone! But she was alone, arranging her music. The room was cool and dark, and sweet with the odor of flowers. She looked up brightly at the sound of his voice, as if she were expecting him, but she was not. She had seen much of him since the catastrophe at the cabin had opened the way for subsequent interviews.

"I beg pardon for rushing in on you this way, Miss Van Ostade. Were you singing? Please go on. Let me find something. Here, you were singing this the first time I ever heard your voice. Will you sing this? Don't begin at the begin-

ning. This is where you were singing when I came up that evening and sat on the edge of the fountain listening to you."

"When was that? You never told me of it."

"No. It was the first evening I came, but — "

"And you were out there in the dark, and we here in your old home, — oh, why — "

"I was not alone, — your voice was with me, and has been ever since, — day and night. Sing it; quick, sing it. I will turn the leaves. Here, at this measure, begin. I was under the arch when you made this trill, and here I came in and sat on the edge of the fountain, and there I remained until the lights disappeared, and the house was still. Now I have confessed, — sing."

And Portia sang. The notes fell like pearls, and then burst forth in a flood of melody, sparkling like a shower of summer raindrops lighted by the sun, and the pulsations of her heart throbbed through them, like the moving of a breeze from heaven.

John, listening, knew she was singing for him as he had never heard her before.

When the song was done, he gathered the music up. "May I have this? May I keep it, and will you never sing it for any one else, never?"

She reached out her hand for it, laughing. "Give it to me," she said. "Why do you want this? I have other things that are better."

"So you will not need this, and I may keep it. You see, I do not want to think of your singing it for any one else in the world as you sang it for me just now. I am — "

"Looking after my reputation? Thank you. I will practise so that I shall not disgrace myself again."

"You know better than that, — don't laugh," he said gravely. "Promise me you will never sing for any one as you sang for me just now, — promise. But, heavens! how can you help it! I have this, at any rate, and shall keep it. Mother and Marguerite are coming. They will be here in a moment, and I don't wish Marguerite to get this and sing it. I wish to hear no one but you."

"Oh, why have you let me sit here singing? I have things to attend to." She began hastily piling the music. Her face paled, and her heart beat faster. "What shall I do? I am afraid of your mother."

"You are afraid of no one; but if you were, mother is not the one to fear, — she is just a weary, little, old lady. Marguerite loves her, and you will love Marguerite. Every one seems to, and I know you will pronounce her a darling. If mother shows any of her old-time prejudice, pay no heed to her notions, and — " he hesitated, — "I have something to ask of you. Will you let me put the horse you rode yesterday in your keeping? I am under the greatest obligations to you as it is, but I ask this because I have certain reasons. I never ride her myself, and the arrangement will save me a world of trouble. I — I have given Alexander directions, — I — I shall call her yours for the sake of convenience, for the present, you know — "

"No, no, Mr. Marshall, I see through your 'certain reasons.' How — this is only one of your ways of giving me pleasure. I can't — "

"And myself also. Our evening rides will end

if I may not have my way. The horse must be yours until December, and you will ride with Marguerite sometimes, will you not? I have a saddle-horse for her, and a team for mother, and this is in my way there in my stable. They must be able to ride and drive, or they will be miserable. There they are, driving in. Tell me, — may I please myself?"

"Must I accept so much from you?" Her heart beat loudly. She turned away her head, and her lip quivered with momentary pride. For an instant she rebelled against her fate. "This woman will despise me, and he knows it," she thought. He stepped toward her, and, stooping, looked in her face. Something glistened on her eyelashes, but she lifted her head and held out her hand with a smile, noting the look of pain in his eyes.

"Forgive me. I can do nothing else, and I need your help more than ever now. I do appreciate your kindness, I do; but that only makes it harder. Otherwise I could lift my head above it, even if she did despise me; but now — Oh, wait, I must call mamma. Stay and take dinner with them. Please!"

She was gone. He went to assist his mother from the carriage, and when he turned toward the house again she stood in the doorway, radiant as a queen.

"Will you go directly to your rooms?" she said. "A journey like this is so fatiguing."

"We are not in the least weary," said Mrs. Marshall. "Clare, where is my —" but Clare was already at the top of the stairs, following the maid.

CHAPTER XVII

A GIRL'S WAY

"SHE is as frail as if a breath would blow her away," said Portia, dropping into her mother's room a moment before dinner. "What a dear little place your room is to rest in!" She threw herself on her mother's lounge, and locked her hands together over her head.

"How little we see of each other now!" said her mother, with a half-sigh.

"Yes, but I am having my reward. I can see you growing stronger, and for the rest I am not going to care. Of course it will be harder than at first, now Mr. and Mrs. Percy are gone, and there are more strangers, and Mrs. Marshall has come; I felt her presence the moment she stepped over the threshold. I see I shall feel just this way every minute she is here, whether she is with me or not."

"Feel what way, daughter?"

"I can't forget for an instant that she is in the house. She looks like a wraith, — as if she had come here to haunt it."

"Don't let your brilliant imagination get the better of you, dear. In my opinion she is intensely human."

"I have asked Mr. Marshall to dinner with his mother. It will help to get over the first evening,

and I 'll rearrange the tables. Mr. Betts is always so cheery; I 'll ask him to sit at grandfather's table, and put Mrs. Marshall there too. She must like grandfather, if she likes any one. How will that do?"

"Very well, I should think."

A merry peal of laughter rang out on the quiet air from the yard below. Portia rose and looked out. Marguerite was talking with John and romping with Juliet.

"They are on good terms already, — she and Juliet; look, mamma. What a pretty little gypsy! There comes Mr. Russell up the path. I do hope he will fall in love with her; it would save me a world of trouble. Don't look as if you thought me bad, mamma; I am going down." She went to the mirror, and looked in absent-mindedly, poking at her fluffy hair. "Mamma, what shall I do about Mr. Russell? They say he is worth millions, and he stays and stays. Would you like a son-in-law worth millions? Would you like one about your age, mamma, — a nice companionable one?" Portia's eyes danced. "Now you think me bad again, but you don't tell me what to do." She added a touch of lilac to her white dress, and sat down at her mother's feet.

"I thought you were going down, dear."

"You are evading. You were asked a question. Mr. Russell will go to his room in a moment, and I will go down. I have ten more precious minutes at least with you, so now tell me."

The mother kissed her smooth forehead. "Follow your heart, deary."

"I can't until I know I have one," she said, albeit with a guilty conscience. "What there is of my heart you have. I could do just everything for you, — could go to Europe, besides, and finish my studies, — fulfil some of my old ambitions — and — well, I would n't keep boarders, at any rate."

"Has he said anything — has he asked — "

"I have managed to escape thus far." Her cheeks flamed. "It is very convenient to have duties now and then. Three times he has tried to say what I could not let him say. He told me the finest thing in the world for you would be to take the Marienbad baths, and he keeps making plans, — says I should be in Germany, or Italy, to become what I might, and that I am wasting my talents here. It 's all very true, but I must marry a fortune and step into a heart vacated by some one else to do it, and he knows I must. If you were a man, would you bribe a girl to marry you? I would not."

"You said he is my age. He can't be so old."

"He is twenty years older than I, at least."

"But that is not so very old."

"No, not for a man, — and with ever so much money," she said mischievously. "How mercenary that sounds! Let 's not talk of it any more."

"But you know you must — "

"I know only too well; but what must I do?"

"Whatever you do, consult only your heart, child; no other course is safe."

"Shall we go down? I must look over the tables. Oh, dear! There is the bell. I told Andy not to ring it in the halls again."

Dinner over, the guests gathered, as usual, in the drawing-room, but soon divided, some seeking the piazza, tempted out by the soft air. John took his cousin to one corner, under the honeysuckles, where they could see Portia as she poured the coffee, the fragrance of which came out through the open windows. Juliet lingered by Portia's chair, and arranged the pretty cups, handing each one to the maid as Portia filled it.

"I won't pass them to-night, because Johnny is n't here any more," she said.

"You can stay here and help me, can't you, deary? Now the little blue cup; that is right. You see I need you." So they poured the coffee together; and John, talking with Marguerite outside, watched the lamp-light play over Portia's face and hair as she bent her head over the little tea-table within. Looking out into the gloom from the brightness, she could not see his face, but she vaguely felt his eyes on her, nevertheless. Marguerite was watching her also.

"What a lovely complexion! but I suppose all Northern ladies have that."

"Complexion? Yes, it is good. Why did n't mother come down?"

Marguerite laughed merrily. "I told her there were only old men and women down here, so she let me come without her." She leaned forward and whispered in his ear, "Aunty said she had no doubt they were a vulgar crowd, and, for her part, she was in no hurry to make their acquaintance. What do you think?"

"We will discuss that another time," he said irritatedly.

"I told her I thought Miss Van Ostade just lovely. What do you think?"

"Possibly you may be right."

"You ought to know, being right here so long. Now, if you are going to be cross the first time we have seen each other for a year, I won't sit with you. I'll go and talk to that youngish woman. What is her name, — Miss Keeler?"

"Miss Keller. She is from Chicago."

"Well, let 's talk to her. Is she nice? Not so nice as Miss Van Ostade, do you think? even if she does keep boarders."

"No, no, sit still. Here comes the coffee. Will you have sugar? Yes. Cream? No. I remember. I fail to see what keeping boarders has to do with niceness."

"I know, you always fail to see something; but there, never mind. We are not going to quarrel this whole summer long, are we? I mean, of course, if I do everything you wish me to, and think just as you do about everything. We never do quarrel when I do that."

"Marguerite, do you really mean what you say? Come, take that last back. Let me hold your cup."

"No, thanks. I don't mean quite all of it, no; but now I am going to say what I really do mean. In spite of all I can do, John, we are going to have a time of it. Aunty has n't gotten over her absurd notion yet." John leaned toward her as she spoke in low tones, and Portia passed them to talk with some guests who had only arrived the evening before; but John was too much absorbed in Mar-

guerite's words to know that Portia's skirts had brushed his chair.

"There is only one thing left to do, John. You must fall in love with some one else. That would settle the matter for good and all."

He laughed. "Why don't you do that?" he said.

"Why don't I? I have tried it over and over again, till she watches me as a cat watches a mouse." She patted her foot on the ground impatiently. John straightened himself and looked about. Portia was leading the guests in to her mother and Mrs. Keller. Mr. Russell followed and led her to the piano, and John looked away.

"John, put your head down so I can talk to you. How provoking you are! I have more to say."

"Let me take your cup back first," he said, longing to be near Portia, if only for a moment.

"I am not through with it yet. Listen. You must fall in love with some one; there is no other way, — I have thought it all out. Now Miss Van Ostade is lovely; you can see that for yourself, if you have any sense. Men are so stupid about such things." The notes of the piano came out to them. Portia had persuaded Mrs. Clare to play a nocturne, and sat near with her hands dropped in her lap, and her head leaning against the wall, listening and thinking.

John glanced that way, and rose. "What nonsense! Marguerite, are you ever going to be wise?" but she was wiser than he thought. "Come, give me the cup. The others are sending theirs back."

"John, listen. Either you must give up and

marry me (stop scowling), or fall in love with her. Aunty is on the war path again."

"Goodness! Don't talk so loud. Very well, then, I 'll marry you."

"No, you won't."

The maid took the cups from him as he entered the hall, and he turned to speak to Hanford, who was just coming down the stairs.

"Why were you not here at dinner?" he asked.

"I was detained," said Hanford, hastily, and passed on out. He lingered near the chair John had just vacated, while the piano rippled on, and Marguerite leaning over the piazza rail, watched the fountain playing in the long path of light which streamed from the open door.

"Miss McLourie," he said at length, bending toward her. She started violently. "I beg pardon; I was too abrupt. May I take this chair?"

She held out her hand and half rose. "Certainly. It is John's place. I was going in, — but I am glad to see you."

"Then prove it by staying a moment, will you not?"

"I am afraid aunt will want me."

"Only an instant. It is so long since I have seen you. It is years."

"Barely one year," she said, seating herself again.

"Surely, you are right. But it is years to me, and this is the last place I ever dreamed of another meeting."

"I wondered why you ever came to this uncivilized — what shall I call it? I understand now."

"Call it wonderland. Do you understand?"

"Of course. Haven't you just told me you thought this the last place on earth where there would be any chance of seeing me?" She looked at the fountain again.

He took up the end of one of the long cherry ribbons that hung down over her white costume, and mechanically wound it round his fingers. "Did you receive the letter I sent you a few weeks ago?" he said. She looked down at the toe of her boot, and then away at the garden. The guests had collected in the drawing-room, all but Mr. Dutton and Mr. Ridgeway, who remained talking on the steps. "You did not get it?" he repeated slowly.

"I did not say so." She turned and looked full in his face. "I said nothing."

"And you wrote nothing."

"We were coming so soon, and, anyway, I don't see what your thinking John and I were engaged had to do with your actions. I rather liked being engaged to him; it pleased aunty, and I had ever so much more freedom. Aunty let me do just whatever I pleased."

Mrs. Clare came to the door and looked out. "Oh, Mr. Ridgeway," she said, "I was looking for you. We want you to play an obligato for Miss Van Ostade, if you will, — the one you played last evening."

"Certainly," he replied, and began to tune his violin.

"Are they to have more music? Then we would better go in."

"It will sound far better out here," said Hanford; but she walked restlessly toward the door.

"Come out in the garden, then. Let us walk once around the fountain, and through those paths and back. They are listening to the music; you will not be missed, nor shall I; besides, I must talk to you, if only for a moment."

"No, don't talk to me," she said, laughing, and taking his arm. "I will go if you won't talk to me."

"But I must. We never finished our last talk. Why not?"

"You are as serious as Aunt Isabel when she has a lecture in store for me. Besides, I want to listen. I love a violin, — and — Oh, what a voice! Who sings like that?"

"Miss Van Ostade. Please look at me, Miss McLourie."

"I can't, in the dark."

"Marguerite, it is not dark. You can see me. Marguerite, why did you come here if you did not want me to tell you this? You knew I must; you knew I could not see you without telling you. You knew why I went away so suddenly, — because I could not trust myself to be near you. Now you are here, I can do nothing else, Marguerite." He took her hand, which was slipping from his arm, and held it. "When you knew how I must love you, all this long time, have you never thought of me, never once? Is it nothing to you that you have a man's heart in your keeping? Is it nothing to you but a plaything?"

She gave a light laugh, but her hand trembled in his. He felt the tremor, and his fingers closed over it.

"No, I don't like men's hearts to play with; I like something better. Aunt Isabel always told me men's hearts are bad; that is why I won't have any of them."

"You have everything; I have nothing, only my love for you. That masters me. I can fight against it no longer."

"Do you think it very complimentary to fight against it? I don't." He drew her hand to his lips, but she took it from him. "If you do so, I sha'n't talk to you."

"It is because I have only — Oh, can't you understand?"

"Do you think, if you had all the wealth in the world, if you were king of all the earth, that by adding that to your love you could make me love you if I did not love you without?"

She stood before him with clinched hands and flashing eyes, this little giant of tyranny; but as suddenly her mood changed. She shrugged her shoulders and spread out her hands with a laugh. He took them both, but she drew them away.

"No, no. I will not talk. I will be free, I tell you, and have a good time all summer long, and you must not trouble me so."

"Does it trouble you so that I love you?" His voice was very low.

"Yes, it does. I tell you it does. I never tried to make you love me. I will be free. I have never had freedom like other American girls. I am an American girl, — I was born here, if my mother was Spanish, — yet Aunt Isabel would always keep me tied to her every moment, or would tie me

to some one else, whether I will or not. No, I will not hear you. I will be free, and go about alone everywhere, and do what I please. I will be tied to no one. I have been led about all my life like a little pet dog, and now, for this one summer, I will go my own way, I will."

He spoke very tenderly. "Marguerite, you little wild bird — "

"There it is again." She sprang from his touch. "I am a woman with a soul of her own. If I were a wild bird, what would you do? Put me in a cage. Oh, I am afraid of you all. Let us go back to the house. If you love me, take me back."

Once more he drew her hand gently through his arm. "We will go back, Marguerite. You are right. See, now, how I love you. All through this long year I have thought of you; hour after hour I have longed for one look into your eyes; your name has been on my lips; and here, this little glove I have kissed a thousand times, have slept with it under my pillow because you had worn it — and yet I banished myself here in this lonely place, never to see you again, because of my friend, to be true to him. Now you are near me at last; you came of yourself. Oh, Marguerite, Marguerite!" His voice shook. She would have spoken, but he continued: "Now, because I love you more than my own soul, hear me; I will never speak to you of my love again until you give me permission. You beautiful woman, with your woman's soul, it is your right to be as free as the winds of heaven. I would not hold you now if I could, until you come to me of yourself, and find

my arms no longer a fetter but a resting-place; but I shall love you, I shall love you, and trust that some day — Only this once — here, in the shadow — no? Marguerite, this once on your lips. See, I promise you, — there, it is sealed with that kiss, and that and that, — forever, until I may, I will not seek to bind you, nor hold you even by my love. If you think this is nothing that I promise, remember how I must see you day after day, and say only the little commonplaces that others say, and even see others trying to win what I have promised to wait for even to the grave." They were silent. "Marguerite, have you nothing to say?"

She looked up. "Only this, if you care for it. I will let no one take your — no one shall win me, but I will be free, and — "

"And what?"

"Never mind." She put out her hands in a half-repentant way, and he took them both. "But — I am sorry, only I can't help it all."

"You go in alone, little one. I am going to walk. To-morrow I will try to meet you just as a common friend. You will be so free that you will forget even that I love you." He kissed her fingers and turned quickly away.

Marguerite lingered without, and finally sat on the edge of the fountain. The sound of the violin came to her in fitful quavers, like a wail. She cried a little, then wiped her eyes, and threw pebbles in the water. Poor little one! her heart ached, but she said, "I don't care. It is his own fault. Why should he persist in loving me, when he sees how it troubles me? I will go in and not

care." But she did not go in, and she did care. She waited there in the deepening darkness until Mrs. Marshall sent Clare to call her. John stood in the door. He had forgotten his little cousin for the time.

"I will find Miss McLourie," he said to the maid. "She was here a moment since."

He stepped out, but the chairs were empty. He sauntered toward the fountain to wait their return, and a white little figure moved among the shadows. "Why, Marguerite, what are you doing here?"

"Throwing pebbles in the water, and listening to the music."

"Alone? Where is Hanford? I thought he was with you.'

"Mr. Clark? How should I know where he is? Why did n't you come back?"

"I don't know. I thought you would both be in, in a moment. I am sorry."

"Oh, never mind. And so this is where you used to live! What a perfectly lovely place! Let 's go off and have all kinds of good times riding and driving. Are there any nice people here, just to make things lively, you know?"

"Yes, a few. I really thought you would find the house such a ramshackly old affair you would be glad to hurry away. What is there about it you find so perfectly lovely?"

"Oh, — I don't know. It is n't the house exactly; it 's her way, and the whole air of the place, and the trees, and that delicious old gentleman we were talking with before dinner, and the hills, and

oh, everything. The freedom most of all, and the violin, and the rest of the music, and — "

"Are n't you rather mixing things? Her way, and the trees, and the delicious old gentleman, — one would think he was something we had served up for dinner."

"We had. I served him up for myself, and seasoned him with — what do you think?"

"I am sure I can't tell."

"With Miss Van Ostade. Do you know he is in love with her? She knows it, if you don't."

John gave an inward start. "Let a woman alone for making such a discovery," he replied in an indifferent tone.

"Of course you don't care," she said, watchfully. "But it was fun to see it going on under one's very nose. Is he rich? He has the air of a rich man. Now, if he is, and she should marry him, what a good time she could have!"

"Marguerite, did you ever have one serious thought in your life?"

"Is n't that a serious thought? I am sure it must be for him. I mean what I say."

"Don't mean it, then."

"There! I thought you were n't so indifferent as you would have me think. Now you see."

"I never saw any one who would presume to form opinions on such slight occasion."

They were going up the steps. Marguerite would not trust herself in the lighted room.

"Oh, Miss Van Ostade, you cannot imagine how charming your voice sounded out here. Why did you stop singing? I was enjoying it so! Good-

night, John. Good-night, Miss Van Ostade. No, I can't stay. Aunty wants me. Good-night." She left them standing there, and hurried up the dingy old stairway.

"Have you seen Josephus lately?" said Portia.

"No, I have been so busy I have not been near for a day or two. He is doing very well, though. It is better that he should not go about for a while."

"Only think. All my life I must feel myself partly the cause of that awful deed, — shooting men down like that, — innocent men."

"Come farther from the door, and sit here a moment," said John. "I want to speak of it only where there is no possibility of being overheard. Surely, you are not blaming yourself still. I beg you will not. Have you told any one?"

"Not even my mother; only you. I think keeping silence in this way only makes me feel more guilty. What must one suffer who has really committed such a crime intentionally?" She leaned her head on her hand, sitting there where Marguerite had sat only so short a time before.

"Must it be that you continue to brood over this?"

"Mr. Marshall, tell me truly. Would you — but I will not ask. I know you would not, and yet would not like to tell me so."

"Please ask me." He stood leaning against the pillar and looking down at her.

"I was going to ask you if you would have done what I did, but I know well enough you would not."

"Why should you give me less credit for being merciful?" he laughed.

"You would have been far more merciful, because wiser. You would have taken immediate steps toward the capture of that wretch, who was the cause of all the trouble."

"Ah, there is where you mistake. Believe me, he was the occasion only, — the cause lies far deeper than either of us can fathom. Won't you trust me that you are in no way responsible for it?"

In the midst of his desire to comfort her came the thought of Marguerite's suggestion, that possibly Mr. Russell might be more to her than he.

"I wish I might believe you, but seeing that sight gives me a sense of iniquity I cannot shake off. I keep saying, 'If I had only done differently!'"

In spite of Marguerite's suggestion, he congratulated himself that at last he had her all to himself, away from her cares, in the coolness and shadow. He took the chair near hers.

"If you had done differently, as you say, you might have had something else to regret all your life. You might have given information, it is true, but, in my opinion, Josephus would have been hung along with Pete, and you would have felt even more to blame, for you would have been the direct cause of a murder."

Portia shivered, and covered her face with her hands, as she had done that night.

"Oh, don't let us talk of it any more. I am afraid you are right. I wish I could get away from this terrible place. That night has taken all my delight in it away."

Mrs. Barry's laugh came out to them in high crescendo. Mrs. Clare and Mr. Ridgeway were trying snatches of new music together, and, among the new boarders, a light-haired young man from New Jersey seemed to be striking up a lively acquaintance with Miss Keller. John was leaning toward Portia in the same attitude she had seen him in when he sat there with Marguerite. She rose instantly.

"It will not do to stay out here; I forget my duty as hostess," she said, and added hastily, "Thank you. You have helped me see this trouble of mine in another way."

John looked at her helplessly for an instant. Going? And what had he gained? He took a hasty step, and, catching her hand, drew her after him.

"Come away," he said. "They are not even missing you. Come where you cannot hear the sound of their voices. You are far too conscientious. No wonder your pleasure here is gone, tied to these people as you are." He led her with long strides down one of the foot-paths. Portia laughed.

"This is the way I used to run away from my nurse," she said. Other laughter reached them from the house.

"There, you see what a good time they are having without you," he said. They looked back and saw Mr. Russell standing in the doorway, gazing out into the darkness. Portia started.

"Oh, oh! I knew I was neglecting something." She would have returned, but he continued to lead her on, and she yielded with a delicious sense of resting, if only for a moment, in the will of another.

"What are you neglecting?"

"I promised to play backgammon with Mr. Russell."

"Why should he monopolize you away from all the rest? Let him play with Mrs. Keller."

"I wish he would." She spoke with an unconscious sigh.

"Why should n't he?" said John, between his teeth.

"I must treat all my guests with equal courtesy, you know. I played with Mr. Betts last evening, and promised this to him. I must go."

"So they vie with each other for your time? I would do the same were I as fortunate as they. I will, as it is. Come, let me steal five minutes only of Mr. Russell's time. I used to play hide-and-go-seek among these trees, but I never dreamed, then, of playing it quite in this way, with an old man." Portia laughed merrily. "If you laugh like that, he will hear you and find you. Confess. Don't you like walking out here in the cool air better than being cooped up in the house with him, playing backgammon?"

"Ah, but my life is not one of doing as I would exactly, although," she added quickly, "it is one of my own choosing, for the present, at least."

"And if you could do just as you choose, what would you do?"

She laughed again. The quick walk sent the blood bounding from her heart, and woke in her the merry mood. "Oh, it would take far more than your five minutes to tell a small part of all I would do."

"Take it, then. I have no conscience. Give it to me."

"No, no, no. I must go back."

"Tell me, first, will you ride Brown Betty? I have sent her to the stables with instructions to Alexander." She was silent, and he urged again, "You only half consented this afternoon. Ride her every day, and forget your numerous oughts."

"You do this only to give me pleasure. What can I do? I dare not say 'no,' and I dare not say 'yes.' Don't you know — "

"I only know what my wishes are. You like to give pleasure to others; won't you give this to me? Let me have my way. I shall be having my pleasure out of the horse, if you will let me go with you sometimes, as I could get it in no other way."

"I can't call her mine, as you said."

"But you must. I will relieve you of all care in the matter. She must be yours for six months. You must have the independence that possession alone will give you. Truly," he added gravely, "I am asking a great privilege. It is my only way of claiming, sometimes, your companionship, away from all these others. I promise you I will only do so by your leave, now and then, Miss Van Ostade."

"Please do not think me ungracious. Perhaps my pride is too great; but, really, it is too much to accept." She felt the hurt she was giving him, and relented. "To-morrow morning I will ride her as you wish, Mr. Marshall. I will go before any one is up. That is my time for running away from people. I will be gloriously happy among

these hills before any one else knows day has begun. I won't try to thank you any more because I cannot."

"Now I must be satisfied, and leave you to your partner for backgammon. But tell me first, you did not find my little mother so very formidable, did you?"

"How could I? She is so frail. I only hope she may be happy here. You have helped me to forget some of the discomfort I was feeling. Your cousin has charmed me and you have talked and walked me out of half my horrible misgivings, — I have been unhappy since that night, — and to-morrow morning I will ride off the other half if I can."

"If you can? You must. Good-night."

"Good-night."

They parted, and John walked off into the darkness, as Hanford Clark had done a few minutes earlier, but with tingling nerves and bounding heart.

CHAPTER XVIII

SPECIAL PLEADING

"HI dar, yo' Andy, wha' yo' duin' wiv dat hoss? Dat ar bery partic'lar. Mist' John done tol' me don' 'low none o' yo' tech 'im."

"Oh, yo' g'long. I jes' slickin' her daoun."

"I knows yo' boy. Yo' gwine teach her trickses. Boy ain' no good. Dey 's all bad."

"Miz Po'tia say she wan' de hoss dis-yer mawnin' right smaht."

"Yo' kyan' tell me nuffin', boy. Yo' t'ink Miz Po'tia gwine give o'dahs tu fool boy like yo' is? G'long yandah 'n' tote heah nudder bucket o' co'n feed 'n' clean de hoss shed." Thus Alexander sputtered in the importance of his newly-acquired old dignity.

"I shall expect you to do everything as well and carefully as you used to for your old master, Alexander," Portia had said. "And you will teach Andrew to take care of the stables and keep things in order, will you not?"

"I will dat, ma'm, yas 'm. I reckon I kin teach Andy, yas 'm." He puckered his wrinkled face and looked at Andy, who was setting onions in a corner of the patch Mr. Ridgeway had devoted to the purposes of kitchen garden, in a doubtful way. "Yas 'm, Andy a dre'fle or'nary nigger, but I 'low I kin l'arn 'im."

Thus was Alexander installed as commander-in-chief of the stables, quite to Portia's satisfaction, and more so to his own. Indeed, had she been unable to find a coachman trained under the old régime, she would have been put to endless trouble and expense; since the younger generation, coming up without the restrictions of the old days, were the most irresponsible of all human creatures. The old man was always to be seen at break of day, pottering around the stables, muttering to himself, or scolding Andrew, or — if his young mistress appeared on the scene — ready with a plentiful supply of blarney, and much genuine courtesy, to anticipate her wishes, if they coincided with his own, or to skilfully evade them if they did not.

Portia stood upon the horse-block, slowly drawing on her gloves, and watching the light creep down the mountain side, touching the tops of dark, clustering pines, and revealing hidden ravines and far-off precipices. The old man spied her, and snatching off his tattered hat, started toward her with a shuffling trot of ostentatious haste, leading the beautiful little brown mare.

Portia took a lump of sugar from her pocket, and coaxed and petted her, putting her arms around the gentle creature's neck, and would have kissed her sleek coat, had not Alexander been watching.

"Dey ain' no hoss nebber been in dis-yer No'th C'liny shine like she shine sence ol' Mars daid," he said, with pride. "Mist' John say, 'Alexandah, min' yo' don' 'low no fool boy tech her. Dat ah Miss Po'tia's hoss,' he say, 'an' min' yo' keep 'er

like she b'long tu de mos' fines' lady ebber lib in dis yearth.' He say — "

"That 's right, Alexander, you have done well, indeed you have," cried Portia, springing to her seat in the saddle. She gathered up the reins, and was off like a shot, past the clump of dogwood-trees where she had sat that morning and thought herself alone.

"I wonder if he did see me racing down the road, and where he was!" Then she began wondering other things about him, and what she ought to do about the horse. Should she accept so great a favor? Could she? "I can't exactly refuse to ride this little darling." She sighed. "What is the use of fretting! I will be happy for this one morning, no matter what comes;" and she was.

A low bank of cloud, presaging a warm day, hung in the east, and the sun was slow in climbing above it. She turned in the direction of Mammy Clarissa's cabin, ascending, slowly, the steep hill at the foot of which was the brawling stream with the hewn log for a foot bridge. Scarcely a breath of air stirred the leaves overhead. A bird-note now and again broke the stillness with a sleepy, half awake twitter. Her horse's feet made a rhythmic clatter on the hard road-bed, and the rushing stream far down the long sweep of shaded hillside seemed an accompaniment, — a sweet, insistent, harmonizing note like a gentle undercurrent to her happy thoughts.

Her anxieties slipped away from her one by one, and she fell into a revery of sweet thoughts, fitting well with the charm of the morning and the

subtle beauty of earth and sky, and the trees and hills, and all the happy, contented things around her.

Clusters of shrubs that had not yet lost their bloom filled the air with fragrance. She spied a squirrel in a mighty chestnut-tree perhaps reckoning on its future crop. Sometimes the stillness seemed intense, then would begin many little noises, — soft bird-calls, dropping twigs, or a light breeze making rustlings and whisperings over her head.

Once it seemed to her that a bit of one of her own songs floated up to her in a merry whistle from the stream below. Could it be — but no. It must be some negro boy gathering "light-'ud" on the hillside. While the little horse took her own time, stopping now and then to crop a bit of leafage, Portia let her mind dwell on the events of the evening before. She saw her sheet of music being rolled up and carried away, and felt his face near hers as it had been that one moment; then she saw him seated, looking into Marguerite's eyes, and then she felt herself being drawn down the garden paths, and the touch of his hand as he bade her good-night, and wondered if it was Marguerite, after all, who filled his thoughts; and as she wondered, the creeping sensation of pleasure came stealing through her whole being; but she put it from her as soon as she felt its growing power, or tried to do so. "Of course he loves that beautiful girl; how could he help it? — And yet, — " and again that sweetest of all sensations came creeping from her heart to her finger-tips.

Clatter, clatter, clatter, sounded the fall of her horse's hoofs, and louder grew the noise of the rushing water as she neared the stream.

"Ah, ha! A brown study, or a rosy study? So this is the way she comes lagging down the hill, the lazy little horse. I was beginning to think you had lost your way."

Portia's face flamed crimson. Ah, the betrayal of her thoughts! She stooped and patted Brown Betty's neck to hide her face for very shame, and, turning her head, looked down the stream.

"You did not know we were coming this way, — Brown Betty and I," she said, with a laugh.

John sprang from the log where he had been sitting, and walked toward her. His horse whinnied from the clump of alder bushes where he had tied him, and stepped restlessly about. "Still, Clyde," he said sternly. "Did n't I know you would be bent on an errand of mercy?"

Portia's happy thoughts had left their impress on her face, and part of its charm lay in the fact that she was unconscious of its transparency. Her eyes glowed with a light that was not from without her heart.

"This for your thoughts," he said, holding a penny on his palm. She leaned over, and giving the back of his hand a light tap, sent the penny flying over his head.

"There it goes, thoughts and all," she cried. "You may have them if you can catch them."

He stood a moment, petting Brown Betty's neck, and watching her face.

"What a noisy stream!" she said.

"What was the rosy-brown study about? I have a reason for asking."

"I did not know you were here."

"Of course not! so you were happy?"

"I told you I would be gloriously happy, riding over these hills, and forgetting everything. You see my thoughts were only forgettings, not worth a penny."

"Everything, — had you forgotten?"

"Every unpleasant thing." He still looked in her face, and she turned away again, and gazed into the stream, as before.

"I came here on purpose to see you, — alone." He spoke in a tense way, and she paled a little, but said nothing. "I even prayed, — if wishing with my heart in heaven that you might come this way may be called praying, because — I had a fright last evening."

She raised her hand to her throat and grew still paler. "Oh, this awful country! What has happened now? Everything seemed so beautiful a moment ago." She glanced behind her nervously. "Have those men turned against you?"

"You beautiful, brave girl, are you afraid?" He came a step nearer, and took hold of her wrist. He could feel the tremor even through her riding glove. "Not for yourself, I know, for I have seen you brave. No, this is worse than any mere physical danger to me. This might ruin my whole life. My little cousin last night told me what I, with my man's blindness, never thought of fearing. I never thought to look for it, because love is blind." He still felt her wrist quiver in his grasp, and took

her hand in both his own. "Yes, let me tell you, — let me tell it all. I have the most right, for I am young and he is old. I, too, love you. Do not take your hand from me until you hear me through. I was not going to tell you this until I had earned the right. I was going to wait and win you; but now, I dare not wait lest some one snatch you from me. What if he loves you? I do not care, I love you more. I am rash and headstrong, but I will do my wooing afterwards. All my life I will be your lover." He spoke rapidly, impetuously. His own hands trembled now, and he reached for both of hers.

Her lips quivered, and her eyes filled with tears. "No, no. Wait." She took her hands from his grasp. "I can't think."

"Will he wait? It is life to me. Must I lose all, who love you best? Has he all the right to speak and I none, because he has had time for wooing?"

"How could Miss McLourie — "

"How could she know so soon? A woman divines. I am a man, — a blind lover who sits and waits."

Portia's heart seemed choking her. She tried to speak, but her lips only moved.

"What right has he above me?" he went on, savagely.

"Oh, do not," she said, at last. "He is only a kindly, sweet-tempered old man, and not so old but that he has the right to feel young."

"Yes, and to love you."

The crimson flamed again to the roots of her

hair, and her breast heaved. "I have given him no encouragement to do so, nor — " she stopped abruptly.

"Nor to me?"

"I was not going to say that."

"Forgive me. I am daring all for fear of losing all. What can I say to you? How can I make you know how I love you? Do you care? Out there in the darkness, alone, listening to you sing, I loved you before ever I saw you. I knew the face that went with the voice would be like yours, and when I saw it I loved it. Let me try to win you." Still she could not speak; her mouth and throat were dry. "That is all I ask now, only to try to win you." He held out his hands to her once more, then let them drop by his side. He trembled to lift her down and hold her in his arms, but stood still and waited. She unbuttoned and buttoned her gloves nervously, then drew them off and put them on again.

"There is much I wish to say," she said at last, "before I even tell you that."

The reins dropped down on Betty's neck, and she improved the opportunity to crop some long tufts of grass. Portia pulled off her gloves again, straightening out the fingers, one by one. At last, with glistening eyes she looked in his. He could not stand that pathetic look, and sprang to lift her down; but she placed her two hands on his shoulders, and gently pushed him back.

"Wait until I can speak of this rightly. Oh, can't you see? It is my heart against my conscience." He threw her gloves on the bank, and,

taking her bare hands in his, kissed them. "Don't make it hard for me," she pleaded.

"I will," he said, in a low voice. "I will make it impossible for you to say what you are trying to say if I can. First of all, tell me, have you given some one else —"

"No, no, that is n't it. Give me time to tell you." She struggled to gain possession of her hands. He let them go, and, suddenly reaching up, took her down from the saddle in his arms.

"If you will not let me have your hands I will have you. If there is no one before me I will win you. I will be your lover, forever, do you hear? No one shall take you from me. Portia, look up. Once? Let me. There! Once more. Now, see? You are mine."

"Oh, not yet, not yet. Let me talk a little and you will see why."

"Once more, on your lips. See? I am waiting."

"But not so. Take your arms away first. I must talk now, it is my right." Her eyes flashed into his, yet she trembled. He led her to the great stump where she and her grandfather had passed Josephus and Gabriella that winter day, — ages ago it seemed to her now. She felt weak, and leaned against the log that spanned the stream.

John tied Brown Betty to a sapling, and, returning, sat down beside her. Neither of them spoke. She looked away from him, gazing into the tumbling water, as before. At last he reached out to her, but she put his hand back, holding it from her with gentle touch.

"Now you must listen to me. Think a moment how short a time you have known me."

"Every week has been a year, because I dared not tell you I was loving you."

"But is it right for you to expect me — "

"No. I ask only that I may love you, — that I may be your lover."

"Ah, but that is everything."

"I tell you I will do all that other lovers do afterward. All the happiness of my life is staked on this one hour."

"You must not say, nor think that. There are reasons. Mother and grandfather are dependent on me." She spread out her hands — those helpful hands — in a hopeless way. "Is not that enough? I told you the battle was with my own heart, — you must not make it hard for me." She bit her lip, as if she would put back her feelings as she had put back his hands. "What have I done, what have I said that you should love me?"

"It is all that you do or say to every one everywhere. We cannot help it, you nor I. It is my heart that will not be satisfied without its love for you. What you say is nothing. If they are dependent on you, they must be on me. If they are yours, they must be mine. Your heart must speak to me, nothing else."

"Oh, can't you understand?" She turned on him and spoke impetuously, as if her words would not be restrained. "It will sweep everything before it. How can I keep strong, doing my duty every day, as if it were my first pleasure, if I give

way to my — to this? I never dreamed of this coming upon me away off here. I have work to do, and must do it. Oh, why have you come? I have no business to listen to you — I had no business to listen to you last night, nor to ride your horse, nor to let go my hold on myself even for a moment. My burdens are precious to me, — to you they might become burdens indeed. I must carry them myself."

"No, you must let me help you. It is my right, by reason of my love."

She rose and held out her hands to him. "Forgive me, and let me go. This is only a sudden thing with you, — it will pass as quickly as it has come. Give up your love now, before it goes any farther. For you there may be another, somewhere, some time; for me only it is hard. For me so precious a thing as your love can never come again. — Don't speak yet. — I must put it from me, and they neither of them must know what I have done. Promise me — " she faltered, then went bravely on — "promise me that you will put me out of your heart, and be happy some day without me. It is the only thing you can do, and this love will pass sooner than you think possible."

"Portia, this is madness. Put you out of my heart? My own? I will not. Come here, little Puritan, you love me. Out of your lips I take the words. When I have kissed you like this, even though they are stolen kisses, are you not mine, forever? I have your love, and that is enough, — I take everything else. If you have a care, it is mine. Why, darling, I have enough; all we need

for us all. Shall I let you go on as you are doing? It is cruel."

Portia felt the earth swaying under her feet. It seemed as if the stream had risen and was sweeping her along in its rushing waters. It was only for a moment. When she opened her eyes they looked into the eyes of her lover, and she knew she must give him all he asked.

"This is unreal, it is not right. Why am I standing here, forgetting everything? My whole hour is gone."

"It is most real and right. This one moment, in which you give yourself to me, is worth living my whole life for."

"I feel as if I were dreaming, and must be wakened. Let us ride. You should have listened to me. I told you my love was stronger than my conscience, that it would sweep all before it; and now see what I have done. I have yielded when I ought not." Awed by his impetuous onslaught, she lifted her face to his in conscience-smitten entreaty.

"My beautiful, did you think yourself hidden in this wilderness, where even love could not find you? Why should you wish that? I sought for my girl of the German bridge and found her here. You could no more keep me from loving you than you could keep the water from dashing over those rocks."

"Because of them. It was hard enough for grandfather to become dependent in his old age, — a thing he never supposed could happen to him; it crushed him to earth. If the duty should be placed on any one else it would kill him."

"We will ride, and talk it over calmly."

"What have I done with my gloves?" she said.

John picked them up from where he had thrown them, and led Brown Betty to her side.

"Now, put your hand in mine, so" — he stooped and looked once more into her eyes — "and call me by my homely old name. Say, 'John, I love you.'" Her hand trembled in his, and her voice faltered as she repeated the words after him. Then she drew back and looked at him. Suddenly her pride gave way. She threw her arms round his neck and hid her face in his bosom.

"Oh, I do, I do. Only it is hard, so hard. I wish I had everything and you had nothing. If only I could give you everything, I would be happy; but now —"

"But now — shall I finish for you? It is I who am to be happy. Is it a little thing you have given me?" He lifted her and swung her lightly into the saddle, and stood a moment by her side. "Do you think I value a woman's love so little? Why, Portia, I am the greatest beggar on earth, and have asked for the sweetest thing, that is all. I am humbled in the dust when I think what I have had the temerity to ask for."

There is no face so beautiful but that it grows more so with the light that shines through its windows, when the heart has opened its doors and taken in the little blind and winged beggar, Love. Portia's face glowed with this light as she bent down toward her lover at that moment, and touched his brow with the tips of her fingers, and felt the clustering rings of his hair close round them as she lifted it from his forehead.

"Are you?" she said, with a smile. "You don't look so."

"No. The touch of your hands makes me a king."

Then she stooped and kissed the smooth, broad forehead she had laid bare. "You must get your horse, John; we will go. I have work to do."

He raised her hand to his lips. "Your lover forever," he said, and did as she bade him.

Slowly their horses splashed through the ford, stepping cautiously over slippery boulders, and scrambling up the other side. Portia felt her happiness quivering through her whole frame, to her finger-tips, yet her heart was full of misgivings. John, on the contrary, glancing from time to time into her beautiful face, with its heightened color, was satisfied. He had won the day.

"Another rosy-brown study? What is it this time?"

She took a deep breath. "The world seems different from what it did this morning. It was beautiful then, too, but now — I feel as if I had been living an age since an hour ago, or were not myself. I am so happy, and yet I feel afraid. How can it last! Let us try to talk rationally, and — "

"We never talked more so. I have done the most rational thing of my life."

"Now you make me laugh at you. No, let us talk good common sense. I see a great many difficulties in the way."

"Ah, but I don't call that common sense."

"In the first place, everything must go on just as if — as if — "

"How can everything go on just as if?"

"Oh, John, you know as well as I that your mother would be horrified if she thought you loved me, and that beautiful little lady, your cousin —"

"She is only a distant relative of my mother's," he said, evading the first part of her remark.

"Oh, why have you done this? Why could you not have fallen in love with her? Your mother could never have been able to object to that, and here you have done what will surely make her miserable."

"You said you wished to talk common sense. If you cannot do better than that let me try."

"Be patient with me. I want a little time to win your mother's love, if I can, lest this should break her heart. John, promise me that. A boarding-house is such a terribly public kind of place, where every one is held up for inspection, as in a tribunal."

"Trust me. If I can't look at you without showing my love for you, I will keep my eyes shut in your presence, and if they ask the reason I will say the light is too —"

"Please, please don't laugh."

"Whatever you wish I will consent to; but, Portia, I will take you away from all of them once in a while. You shall not be more theirs than mine. Moreover, this slavery of yours shall not go on forever."

"Oh, where are we going? See how high the sun is." She started to turn her horse's head, but he detained her.

"It is not so late, only seven; go on to old

mammy's first. You were going there. Your lazy boarders are just turning over for another nap. Was that a sigh? Give me a reason for it."

"It makes me a little sad to see you so happy. I can't tell why, but I fear so much. What good is my love to you? Everything must go on the same, and it will make you miserable. I would have saved you from this if I could. If I could only have known — but then — that would have been impossible. A woman dare never allow herself to think that a man is possibly going to love her. She can never forestall, because she must never know until it is too late."

"Thank Heaven. I shall make you say the little lesson over and over every day until I have my way. It is a good way. Tell me. is it not?" They were approaching the little clearing. "Tell me, is it a good way?"

"I know to me your way will be a very sweet way. I will love to make it mine forever; but for the present I must do my own way, even if it may be hard for us both."

He lifted her from the saddle as she spoke. "Oh, John, you must not kiss me any more in this way, not until I can be your very own, and that may not be for a very long — Oh, John!"

"I will see your grandfather, and tell him I love you. You are mine now, Portia; say you are."

"I can't say that yet, and you must say nothing to grandfather. I am not free to say anything yet but that I love you. I am not free to say I am yours. I have my work to do; and John, is it so hard? You must wait."

"Not so hard now as it was, sweetheart, now that I know you are not to be snatched from me. I can wait, but I will be your lover. Now that is the way I want your eyes to shine, for me and no one else. Look at me again like that. I am afraid no longer. You may play backgammon with your elderly boarder or ride with your handsomest one and sing to them all; but for me, I will remember how you sang for me last evening, before my mother came, and how you looked at me just now, and no one of them all will carry so light a heart as I. Now one more kiss and I will let you go to have your own way, sweet."

CHAPTER XIX

MAMMY CL'ISSY'S BURYIN' CLO'ES

EVERYTHING was quiet about the little cabin. In one corner of the small enclosed space stood two mules with their necks crossed and their ears lopped forward. On the rail fence near them, basking in the sun, sat the boy whose business it was to take care of Josephus, with much the same expression of sleepy contentment on his face, and not far from him, perched on the same rail, and watching him with half-closed eyes, sat Mammy Clarissa's cat. The sun shone aslant on the peaceful scene, and cast elongated shadows on the bare earth of the cabin, the mules, the boy, the cat, and the rail fence; and across the yard stretched the immense shadow of a naked pine that towered high above the roof, waving at its top a tuft of green needles, like a worn old brush for sweeping the sky.

"Poor Joe's corn looks spindling, all choked with weeds," said John. "Hello, Jenks, how 's Joe this morning?"

"He ain' no mo' 'n mid'lin'," said the boy, sleepily.

Old Clarissa stood in the cabin with her back to the open door, gazing at a curious motley of clothes laid out on the patchwork cover of her best bed. She leaned on her stick, and her lips moved as if she were talking to them. As the shadows of John

and Portia darkened the doorway, she spread out her hands as if she would guard them from intruders' eyes, but when she saw who her visitors were she brightened, and hobbled toward them with elaborate cordiality.

"Laws, honey, am dat yo'? Howdy, honey, howdy, Miss Po'tia. Hu-come yo' heah dis time o' day?"

"How's Joe this morning?" said John.

"Joe's po'ly. I 'low he ain' gwine be like he uset tu no mo'. Joe he strivin' in he's min' how he gwine git fo' tu pay fo' turrer mule. He don' git no peace fo' dat frettin' an' strivin'."

"Oh, he must n't fret. He 'll come out all right, and pay for the other mule too." John's voice was cheery with his own hope and gladness. "I'll go up and see him." He tossed his hat on a chair and began climbing the ladder leading to the loft above.

Portia glanced curiously at the strange assortment of clothes on the bed. "What are you doing, mammy, making over some dresses?"

"Naw, Miss Po'tia, dem ar 's my buryin' clo'es."

"Your what?"

"Dem ar 's my buryin' clo'es, but I 'low de Lawd ain' nuvvah gwine leab me wah dem."

"I don't understand what you mean. What are they for?"

"De clo'es I gwine wah tu de grabe, chile, ef de Lawd take de curse off an' 'low me tu die."

"Why you don't want to die yet, — you are not so old. What do you mean by taking the curse off?"

"Laws, Miss Po'tia, I kyan' splain 'bouts dat. Dar's de curse ob libbin', an' dar 's de curse ob dyin', an' I reckon de Lawd done sot on me de curse ob libbin'. I 'low I ain' nuvvah be 'lowd tu wah dese heah clo'es, nohow." She held up one of the dresses made in some strange and obsolete fashion, a thin pink lawn, from which the pattern had long since been washed away. "I been layin' dese heah by many long yeah. Dis 'n Miss Mann done gib me. Dat time de fevah tuk me I 'lowed I 'd git free tu wah hit, but I did n' dat time. Den de style done change, an' I don' wan' be laid in de grabe in ol' aout o' style clo'es nohow. Den dis 'n, Joe he went up tu Asheville, an' I gib 'im dollah fo' git de cloff, an' dar come 'long lady f'om de No'f wha' done tole me haow de style ah, all two-skyrted, wid dis heah skyrt hangin' ovah turrer."

"This looks quite new; have n't you ever worn it?"

"Laws, no, Miss Po'tia, I ain' none o' yo' po' white trash tu be buried in ol' aout o' style clo'es, I ain'."

She began laying the clothes carefully in a pine box, with a cover fastened by a padlock, and hung with leather hinges, and then shoved it in the farthest corner under the bed. As she raised herself from the floor, Portia thought she seemed more aged and bent than when she last saw her. She apparently forgot Portia's presence and continued talking to herself, rocking back and forth in her large chair, and staring into the embers. "Wah dem clo'es? Naw, I 'low de Lawd ain' nuvvah leab me wah 'em. I reckon he ain' gwine 'low me pass nohow. O Lawd, O Lawd!"

"What is it, Clarissa?" said the girl at last, compassionately. "Why do you talk so?"

"Why, honey, chile, I cl'ar done fo'got yo' heah. Is yo' had breakfus'? I reckon yo' nigh dyin' fo' a taste o' Cl'issy's cookin'." She seemed to waken to her old life and vivacity as the idea of hospitality seized her, and, uncovering the coals, she threw on some pine knots and hung the kettle.

"No, no," said Portia, "we are going right away as soon as Mr. Marshall comes down. I have more linen for you to mend when you are ready for it."

"Fotch hit 'long, honey; I 's right smaht glad tu git de wo'k. Now yo' sit an' I 'll hab cup o' coffee right smaht. Mist' John, he know ol' Cl'issy's coffee good."

"Oh, don't trouble, please don't."

"Yas, Miss Po'tia; I 'members right well Mar's Gen'l he uset tu say, dar ain' no use libbin' 'daout hospitableness."

She had grown so animated and happy in her bustle of preparation that Portia had not the heart to stop her, and in an incredibly short space of time her little pine table held as tempting a breakfast as two hungry mortals could wish, — corn bread, eggs and bacon, crisp, sweet, and sputtering hot, and cold chicken and coffee.

"Had your breakfast, Joe?" said John, perceiving the odor with the pleasure of a healthy appetite.

"Yas, sah; mammy she ol' an' crupple, but I 'low she wo'th mo' 'n I is now," said Joe, weakly.

"You 're all right, Joe. You pull yourself together and get out of here, and things will look brighter.

Don't fret about your mule; I'll see that you get work as soon as you are able; and if those young fellows are in a hurry for their money, I'll loan you a bit until you are ready to earn it. All you have to do is to haul yourself together, and we'll have work enough to keep you and those precious mules busy all the fall and winter too."

"Mist' John, oh, Mist' John, come right 'long an' eat yo' co'n bread while hit hot fo' melt de buttah. Co'n bread col' ain' no good nohow," called Mammy Clarissa from the foot of the ladder.

"Yes, mammy, yes, I come with the greatest alacrity. Good-bye, Joe, mind what I tell you, and don't get down-hearted. — Why, mammy, this is like the times I remember when you used to cook me a meal all my own, when I used to pay for some fun by being sent off without my dinner."

"Sholy, honey, sholy. Yo' ain' tasted yo' ol' mammy's cookin' fo' nigh on tu fifteen yeah. Gabr'ella done fotch dis buttah, an' I done rose de chicken an' aigs my own se'f, an' buy dis bacon wid de dollah yo' gib me turrer day. Draw up yo' cheer, Miss Po'tia, an' eat. Dis mighty po' far' fo' yo', I reckon, but rid'n' 'fo' breakfus' makes young folks like yo' is hungry 'nuff tu tu'n co'n bread 'n' bacon intu bes' kin' o' high-tone victuals."

"I wonder what that old woman has on her mind," said Portia, as they strolled back to their horses through the wildwood tangle. "She says the Lord has laid on her the curse of living."

"Oh, her head is stuffed full of superstitions. They all are, the negroes."

"She has some strange ideas about death. Did you see those things laid out on the bed? She says they are her burying clothes, but that the Lord is not going to allow her to wear them. Poor old thing! she did n't seem to wish to talk to me about it. I tried to find out what she meant, but she changed the subject and began to cook our breakfast."

"Perhaps she thinks some one has 'tricked' her, as they say. They always lay their misfortunes to some such thing." He led Brown Betty out from the shade where he had tied her and lifted Portia deliberately into the saddle.

"You need not do that; I can spring up as I always do."

"But it is my privilege now, is it not?"

"It is sometimes; but John —" she stopped abruptly.

"What is the 'but'?"

"I told you. Your happiness frightens me. It is beautiful, but how can it last? Even now I must begin asking hard things of you. I must ask you not to ride home with me, or not any further than the turn in the road, there by the dogwood-trees."

"Where you sang to me the very next morning after our first meeting? I will turn back at that place, and why?"

"My face will tell tales." She flushed crimson at the thought of riding up the walk with him, under the scrutiny of her assembled household. "They will all be out there on the piazza, wondering where on earth I have been."

"How can I help being happy when your face tells tales of your heart, and I know that the story

is mine? I am not proof against it even if all the world guesses."

"Our love is sacred. I cannot have them prying into it. After a while I may get used to it. The feeling is so new now, I cannot let any one look into my heart."

John rode close to her, and touching the hand hanging down by her side said, "Is it a sweet feeling, Portia?"

She lifted her eyes to his and gave him a look he never forgot. "Ask your own heart, John; you will find the answer there."

"One would think that answer should satisfy me, but I will ask it over, only to hear you say it again."

Portia was right. All had breakfasted, and most of the guests were lounging about the piazza, discussing the weather and indulging in badinage. Marguerite sat on the edge of the fountain dabbling in the water with Juliet, and talking with Mr. Held, who had returned in the early morning from a trip over the mountains. All eyes were fixed on Portia as she rode up the drive. Mr. Russell came forward, alert, with beaming face, to assist her from the saddle.

"We have missed you this morning," he said.

"What a dear horse!" said Marguerite, petting Betty's neck, and feeding her a rose from the bunch at her belt.

"Indeed she is! You must try her some time," said Portia. "Thank you, Mr. Russell. Where is Andy? Here, Andy, take the horse, and tell Alexander I wish to see him in about half an hour. We are glad to see you back again, Mr. Held. Have

you just come? Have you breakfasted? You see, I ran away this morning."

"I see."

"Was your trip successful?"

"Come and look over my sketches. You shall judge for yourself."

"How delightful! I must say a word to the cook first, however; one cannot ignore meals even for art. Artists themselves are hungry sometimes, I am told."

"Never, Miss Van Ostade, never."

"Never?" cried Mrs. Barry. "You were not here at breakfast, Miss Van Ostade, or he would not dare say that. He said he had been starved for a week, and ate as if he had been, too."

"I can't imagine what is keeping John," said Marguerite; "he was to be here early this morning."

"Then he surely will," said Portia, guiltily. "Let us all go in and look at Mr. Held's sketches. They are charming. You will not miss him when you see them."

"He promised to send me a horse, and to ride with me. Never mind; I would much rather look at your sketches, Mr. Held, and I shall tell him so, too."

"Thanks, I will try to believe what you say."

"We have been dying to have those boxes opened," said Miss Keller, coming down the steps with the young man from New Jersey. "Mr. Held, Mr. Vedder."

"Happy to make your acquaintance, sir. Then we will open them immediately. I am always ready to save life."

"Especially when you can charm at the same time, Mr. Held?" said Marguerite.

"I must inquire after Mrs. Marshall," said Portia to her.

"Oh, she is well. She almost always is. She did not come down this morning, but she means to drive after a while, I think."

"I hope she will not find it dull here."

"No, aunty never is dull. Sometimes she pretends to be. She should rest now at any rate, for she was going all the time in New York."

"I am sure she never could be dull with you always with her; I need not have asked," said Portia, with a smile. "I shall be back in a moment, Mr. Held," and she left them, hurrying to the kitchen.

"Surre, Miss Porrtia, an' it 's an awful leddy yees have up shtairs now. The Frinch gurril is comin' into me kitchen ivrry blessed minute wid a new notion in her head, an' now it 's ''Ave yees any ice in this howl iv a place?' an' now it 's 'Th' eggs is too harrd, an' th' eggs is too saft,' an' it 's mesilf 'll invite 'er to cook 'em hersilf next."

"You must n't mind, Maggie; no doubt she is tired."

"An' it 's tired she must be wid thinkin' up new things fer wantin'."

"Well, you know it won't do to talk about our guests, so we will say nothing, and you must do the best you can."

"There 's a load o' things come down from Asheville, Miss Porrtia, an' herr 's the bill o' thim."

"Oh, I am glad. Have they sent the fruit? Yes, here it is. That is one thing off my mind. Bring

that Dresden bowl, Maggie, the blue one." Portia began hastily unloading good things from the hamper which made weekly trips between Patterson and Asheville to keep the house supplied with necessary articles. Semi-occasionally a similar hamper was sent on from New York.

"You may put away these as I take them out, Maggie; wait until I can check them off. That is right."

Portia's rapid movements soon restored order to the old kitchen. The hamper was carried out, and she began arranging some of the fresh fruit in the dainty Dresden bowl.

"Call Lucy; I wish her to take these to Mrs. Marshall's room. Bring me some roses, — no, — just the buds, Maggie, those are too full-blown. Now, is n't it pretty?"

"It's yersilf makes ivry thing purrty wid the touch av yer han's," said Maggie, warmly.

"Ah, Maggie, that's blarney. Don't you remember how I spoiled the cake for you yesterday, putting on the frosting? Here, Lucy, take this bowl of fruit to Mrs. Marshall's room. Say Miss Van Ostade sent it, and don't stay; just hand it in and go away."

The dish did not look quite so pretty when it reached Mrs. Marshall, for one or two of the great ripe cherries had found their way into Lucy's capacious mouth, but it was enough to win gracious thanks from the recipient later, when she entered the room while all were occupied in looking over the sketches.

"This waterfall is charming," said Portia. "Where

did you find such a wonderful spot? Is it near here?"

"It is only about four miles from Patterson, six from here, I should think."

"So near? We must visit it."

"Let us all go and make a day of it," suggested Mrs. Barry.

"How do you get there," said Mr. Ridgeway; "by carriage?"

"It can be reached in that way — I had my trap, you know — but on horseback is much the better way. It might be a little rough for ladies, but they have done it."

"Of course we can," cried Marguerite. "I mean to go there if I have to go all by myself. Were you ever there, Aunt Isabel?"

"Long ago. But my jaunting days are over. You must find some one else to chaperone you on such trips."

"Not at all necessary, Aunt Isabel. I will go without one. I am an American girl."

"I will undertake that duty with pleasure, and I warrant Mrs. Marshall it will be well done," said Mr. Held.

"We shall all be glad to chaperone Miss McLourie," said Mr. Russell.

"Oh, that would never do. Some one must stay here to chaperone Aunt Isabel."

"Marguerite!"

"You know it is my duty to look after you, aunt."

"When shall we go?" said Mr. Held.

"The sooner the better," said Mr. Vedder.

"Right away — if possible, to-morrow," exclaimed Mrs. Barry.

"Would n't the day after be better?" said Portia. "We must have a lunch, you know."

"That is right, day after to-morrow," cried Marguerite; then, in an aside to her guardian, "Where can John be? He was going to send the horses this morning."

John was at that moment prowling over the new building, taking note of the work, and dreaming of his future. Crossing the road to the station later he saw Lord Chesterfield leave his parlors in faultless attire, with a neat black case in his hand. He had regular customers at the new boarding-house. The world was looking up for him in these days.

"Why, Chas, you look quite aristocratic. Where are you bound for?"

"De new bo'din'-haouse, sah. I has a right smaht heap o' customers daoun yandah. Da 's de ol' gen'l'man wi' de fine long mustaches, — he keep he's face shave mighty clean an' young lookin', an' da 's de light young gen'l'man come turrer day, an' Mist' Held, he done come back 'gin, — I 'low he wan' see me 'long baouts dis time."

"Shave them up well and don't waste your money."

"Naw sah, naw! I don' waste no money." No, Chas never wasted money, except on his own precious person. His ruling passion, and the great stimulus of life was the accumulation of dollars and cents, as much as if he were a full-blooded white man and the son of a Wall Street broker. Just now he was bent on marrying Gabriella Gunn,

because she was industrious and saving, as well as good-looking; but still his affections were divided between her and a chambermaid in Asheville, whose complexion was seven times darker than midnight, who had laid by the magnificent sum of three hundred dollars with which she was trying to tempt this dashing young cavalier. Now as he walked, he weighed in his mind the advantages of each. If he took the one of midnight skin, he might buy him a fine cart, like the one Mist' John rode about in. He would not walk in the dust and heat; but would drive to and from his little jobs, an enviable spectacle in the eyes of his brethren. Louisa Ann and he might have a fine little place near the new hotel, where she could add to their pile by doing chamber work. Surely the plan was good, — but as he took his solitary way, swinging his case, and mopping his brow with a strongly perfumed silk handkerchief, he saw walking easily along before him, with her basket poised on her head, her arms akimbo, and her lithe body erect under the load, "Miss Gunn," and all the persistence of his most persistent nature was roused to conquer her with his oft repeated assurances of undivided love.

"Mawnin', Miss Gunn, mawnin'!" he said, with his most flattering smile. Gabriella was inclined to be affable this morning, and beamed on him with eyes and teeth bewitchingly. They paused in the road to pass the time of day, and make elaborate inquiries into each other's state of health. This seemed a most propitious time, so, as they walked on together, Chas drew insinuatingly near, and passed his arm about her waist.

"Laws naow, quit yo' foolin'," she said, with a laugh. "Haow yo' s'pose I gwine tote yo' an' dis-yer co'n meal up de hill? Kyan' yo' tote yo' own ahm 'daout hitchin' hit on tu me? Quit! Yo' baoun' tu upset dis-yer basket."

"Yo' haish! Did n' I tol' yo' I ain' gwine put up wid yo' foolin' no longer? Yo' like tu craze me wid yo' goin's on. I reckon I 'll be tuk sick 'fo' long, I been so trouble' in my min'."

"Likely yo' is trouble' in yo' min'." She shrieked with laughter, setting down her basket, that she might shake herself in her merriment. "I see yo' mighty trouble' in yo' min' studyin' haow yo' gwine git 'long wid Gabr'ella Gunn one day, an' dat fine young lady in Asheville nex'."

"Dey ain' no gal in Asheville kin stan' 'longside Gabr'ella Gunn."

"Naw, likely not. I hyeared yo' co'tin', yandah in Asheville. I done hyeared yo' co'tin' Louisa Ann Williams, ol' Bija's gal. She tu pu'ty tu stan' 'longside whar I stan'. I 's seed her heap o' times."

"Look a-heah, Gabr'ella, I been so hu'ted in my min' wid yo' foolin' I jes' tryin' tu like nudder gal, but I sw'ar I kyan' du hit nohaow, I 's dat fool gone on yo', Gabr'ella, an' heah yo' smile one day, an' chide de nex'."

"Yandah comes Mist' Ridgeway's cahiage. Is yo' seed ol' missus? Nance say as haow she come back 'gin. Nance say as haow Alexandah wife, she say Alek, he mos' knock aout de las' toof in he's haid, he so s'prised, an' he's teef knock togedder like he see a ghos', dat time she come 'longside de cahiage like she step aout'n de grabe."

"I seed her git off'n de kyar las' ebenin', but I 'low she nuvah knowed who I war. I nuvah let on like I seed 'er. I spec' she hate de berry sight o' we-all, sence she kyan' call we her cattle, an' set de ovahseah on us like she uset tu no mo'. I kin 'membah right well dat time I peek t'roo de shed doah, an' I seed her stannin' dar an' de ovahseah, an' ol' Kate cryin' in de kitchin. Ol' Kate she say, 'Run 'nd peek, chile, quick; I 'low dey 'll kill Cl'issy,' an' I peek, an' dar lie Cl'issy, an' ol' missus lookin' on, an' de ovahseah lay on de lash like he nuvah gwine leab a speck o' skin on her back." Chas paused to look after the carriage as it rolled past, then continued, "I seed mo' 'n dat tu, oncet. Dat time Mars'r war in Wash'nton, an' missus she run de place. She run hit right ha'd tu w'en she run hit, a smilin' one day, an' a lickin' de nex'."

They had come to the turn where their roads lay in different directions, and now they proceeded to take as elaborate a leave of one another as if they were not to meet again for months.

CHAPTER XX

THE BLIND WOMAN'S VISIT

"MA," said Miss Katherine, a few days after Mrs. Marshall's arrival, "ought we not to call on John's mothah? Shall we go to-day?" The old lady turned her sightless eyes on her daughter a moment, but said nothing. "I know, ma, we can't do like we used tue, but ouh family is as good as hers, if we ah poor, and the ride will do you good. We have n't made a call together foh an age."

"It is n't that there is any question of family between us; there never was; but you know I can't see her now, and I don't care to have her pitying me, — but there, Katherine, you are right, we would better go." She was silent a moment, lost in thought, then spoke again. "Mrs. Marshall never was one to look up to any one else, but as far as family goes, she might have looked up to your father."

Katherine sat in a low chair with her lap full of roses, arranging them in a row of vases before her, and snipping off the thorns and imperfect ones as she talked. They were seated in the shade of vines, in one corner of the broad piazza that ran around three sides of the house. Mrs. Wells swayed slowly back and forth in a rocker and fanned herself with a palm-leaf fan.

"Of coa'se I know pa's family was of the very best in this country, where there is no real aristocracy, and so was youas, mothah, foh that mattah, but there it is, she is as rich as evah they were, while we, — where ah we? How comes it that the wah used us-all up, and left her as rich as evah, o' richer?"

"It's no North Carolina property she 's living on now, daughter. I reckon there in Cuba, while we were losing, they were making hand over fist. Her father was never one to lose a good chance, and she has the thrift of the whole family condensed in one for saving. I well remember when the General was all taken up with his political duties, she managed that place better than ever he did, — she got more out of the niggers than ever he did, for one thing."

"I always thought the Yankees were the ones for making money, — she 's no Yankee."

"No, but she 's from one of those rich old Spanish families, and I 'm thinking there never was a nation that cared more for gold. The old General was free-handed and open-hearted, but she was close both ways, and yet she was lavish too, in a way." Mrs. Wells swayed thoughtfully a moment in her rocker, and Miss Katherine snipped at her roses; then her mother resumed the thread of her talk. "She would do some big, generous thing when she felt like it, but she knew how to hold her own as well as any one I ever saw; but then, we were always good friends. Yes, of course we must call, and that right soon."

"I think there 's some one coming. I see dust ris-

ing ovah the rise in the road, — suah enough, it 's John and Miss McLourie ! "

The young people were upon them before Miss Katherine could shake the rose-leaves from her lap. Some one else was with them. It was the artist. As they drew rein before the long piazza, he it was who assisted Marguerite from the saddle. Happy little Marguerite ! she needed only the glow which the exercise brought into her cheeks to make her startlingly beautiful.

" Do go on with your flowers," said Marguerite after the introductions were over. " You don't know how pretty you looked seated among these vines with your lap full of roses. Did n't she, John? Let me help you."

" Help me look pretty? Indeed you can do that very easily, — sit right beside me." The two gentlemen laughed. Marguerite laughed too, but did as she was bid.

" Come here, child," said Mrs. Wells. " You know I cannot see you, and I wish to know if you are like your mother. I used to know your beautiful mother."

" Miss McLourie is a young lady, ma, she is not a child."

Marguerite obediently went over, and knelt down by her chair, while the old lady lightly touched her hair, her cheeks and forehead, and chin, and throat and hands.

" Yes," she said at last, " you are like your mother, and I have looked into your eyes when you were a little dimpled baby, and held you in my arms in your long white dresses. You were such a peaceful baby."

"What a change you have undergone, Marguerite," said John, teasingly.

"No wonder! if you had held me I would have screamed and kicked." As she turned to pout at John, she caught the look of open-eyed admiration on the face of the artist, which he was unconscious of showing, it being merely the scientific admiration to which he thought his art entitled him.

Marguerite comprehended, and a gleam of resentment flashed into her eyes, as she thought, "I 'll teach him to look at me as if I were some old ruin, or something to put in one of his old pictures," but she only turned toward Miss Katherine with a smile.

"We are all going on an excursion to the loveliest place; Mr. Held found it. And we want you to join us. Miss Van Ostade sent us, or rather was coming herself, and we said we would bring it — the invitation — for her."

"As well as for ourselves," said John.

"Of course, and you will go, will you not?"

Katherine looked at her mother, and the blind woman, divining as if she could see, responded to the look. "Yes, Katherine, Gertrude can do all I wish. Of course she will go, it will do her good."

"But motheh —"

"Don't stop to think of any 'buts.'"

"No, don't," said John.

"How long must I be away?"

"Only two days; one to go, one night there and one day to return."

"Oh, neveh!" Katherine was appalled. "Why, I have n't been away from ma foh ten yeahs." She rose in a flutter and brushed the rose-leaves from

her dress. "I cannot. Theah 's only Gertrude heah, and Gabe, — but he 's no good."

Mr. Held eyed her critically. "She would make a fine study," he thought, "and the old lady too, just as they are."

"Where do you go?" asked the mother.

"It 's up at a place they call Hibbard's Lodge. I know the man who built it. He lives in Washington, and goes up there once a year. The rest of the time an old man and his wife keep the place and make what they can from the few travellers who come that way. The only trouble is, you have to take what provision you need along with you, for the old couple never keep much on hand, — but it 's all very neat, and well kept."

"Is that the way you did?" asked Marguerite, roguishly.

"No, I lived on scenery and paint."

"Well, what word shall we take to Miss Van Ostade?" said John.

"Come," said Marguerite, drawing Katherine after her, "don't say no, until we talk it all over. Let us go in here while they visit."

Katherine yielded to the gentle pull, and so once more the little witch had her way, and in five minutes had made a resting-place for herself in Miss Katherine's heart. They returned the best of old friends, because, as Marguerite explained to Katherine, "You see, your mother knew my mother, even before she was married, and held me in her arms when I was a tiny little baby, so it seems we have always been friends, does it not?" A fact which the child had learned for the first time a few

moments before as she knelt by the blind woman's chair; but how should Katherine know it, had it not been told over and over again by Aunt Isabel, and so she loved them both the better for the thought, and no harm was done by the innocent deception, which, to do Marguerite justice, was not intended as such.

"Yes, John, she will go," said Marguerite, triumphantly, "and now we must settle about time and everything."

"And I must think about ma tue, she can't stay all alone with that Gertrude."

"Now, daughter," — said the mother, and there was more debating, until the matter was settled to Miss Katherine's mind. John would ride over and ask Mrs. Chaplain to spend the time of Katherine's absence with her mother. "Yes, that would do," and: "She would surely go?" "Yes, surely." Then the three visitors rode away satisfied, and Katherine watched them out of sight with beating heart. She was really to have an outing of the old-fashioned kind! The old times were coming back, and people were beginning to live once more.

"John and I will ride over again as soon as all the arrangements are made," Marguerite called back, with a glance that made Mr. Held envious of John for a moment. Ah, she was already beginning to play her little tunes on the sensitive harp of his artistic nature! They rode on ahead in the narrow road, laughing and chatting, while John, absorbed in his own hopes and plans, took his way in the rear, dreaming and thinking.

That afternoon Katherine drove her mother over to the boarding-house, in the obsolete vehicle which

still remained of their former grandeur, and with the old brown pony. The call was made in as great state as was in their power. Mrs. Marshall was peculiarly gracious that afternoon. She shed tears as they talked over the past, and condoled with her old friend on her blindness.

"But you are not much worse off than the rest of us," she said at last. "You are spared the pain we have to endure of seeing such dismal changes. You can think of it all as it used to be, without the dreadful truth being forced on you continually that the South has been defrauded, ruined, by the vilest injustice." Her laces trembled around her face and throat, as she raised herself, and sat erect among the cushions that had been heaped around her. "Think what I must feel, here in the house that used to be mine, surrounded by these Northern women, who have come here to make money from our misfortunes. I wish I could n't see them, I 'm sure."

"Why, aunt, you had money enough. Why did you sell the place if you cared so much for it? You could have kept it."

"Kept it? What should I have kept it for? Robbed of my rights, robbed of my servants, robbed of my husband, — kept it indeed! I only wish we had the war to fight over again, and that all the soldiers might be women."

Miss Katherine sat silent, with her hands folded in her lap. "Well," said her mother at length, "the past is past, and war is terrible at best. I would not wish to go through it again."

"No, not with your calm disposition, but mine was different. If we had had an army of women

with my spirit, we would never have given up until the ground all over the South was saturated with our blood."

"I believe you, aunt: you would have made a splendid general; but I would not have been one to saturate the ground with my blood, I can tell you that. Ugh! What a thought it is! What if Miss Van Ostade should hear you!"

"She will hear it soon enough, if I stay here, — palavering hussy. She will bear watching. I have my eye on her."

"Why, aunty, what do you mean?"

"Marguerite, you are a child. Why did I come to this horrid place at all?"

"To please me, aunt, of course, and it's lucky I am a child, for if I had been born when you were, you would never have had the pleasure of taking care of me, and I could never have called you aunt."

"The past is past, as you say," said Mrs. Marshall, ignoring this sally, and settling herself back among the cushions. "But we can't forget, though we may suffer."

Marguerite laughed merrily. "How you must suffer, aunt, lying in that chair among Miss Van Ostade's cushions."

"And what a tease you must be," said Miss Katherine, gayly.

"I never mind her. She is thoroughly spoiled," said Mrs. Marshall, languidly.

"That's so, aunty dear, and who could have done it? Come, Miss Katherine, — I call you that because John does, you know, — come out and swing

in the hammock while aunt lugubriates. She enjoys it. Clare will call us when Mrs. Wells wishes you."

So they went out and swung under the trees for an hour while the older ladies reviewed their past, and as they chatted and swung, Miss Katherine felt herself growing younger, and the younger maid, playing so successfully on the heartstrings of the elder, felt her own being stirred with a loving impulse, and, leaning over, took the fine sweet face of Miss Katherine in her two hands and kissed it.

"There, I have been wanting to do that, and now I have done it," she said.

Miss Katherine flushed with pleasure, and drew the siren close to her side. "Here comes Clare," said Marguerite; "we must go in."

Two men, her lover and the artist, had emerged from the thicket of wild shrubbery that skirted the edge of the woods encircling the homestead on three sides. They both saw this little episode, and each took note of it in his own way.

"Mrs. Marshall and her ward are most charming," said Mr. Held. "A great acquisition to our small coterie here."

"They are indeed, especially the ward, don't you think?"

"Certainly, that goes without saying. Shall we join these ladies?"

"As you like, I must leave you here."

So Hanford passed on, merely lifting his hat, leaving the artist to follow at the leisure of the ladies. Marguerite was a trifle piqued, but she kept up her merry chatter, and the glance of her dark eyes toward his retreating figure was unnoticed

by her companions. As they neared the house, Portia came out to meet them. She began cordially urging Miss Katherine to stay through the evening.

"You should not make a formal call on such old friends," she said. "I am sure —"

"Indeed they must not," interrupted Marguerite. "Just wait, I will ask Mrs. Wells," and she followed Clare up the stair.

But Katherine was thinking of the long drive home in the dark, and of John, with only the small Gertrude to attend to his evening meal. "Oh, I can't stay," she said.

"Andy can take your horse back now, and Alexander will drive you home in the evening," said Portia, divining her thoughts, "and we will send for Mr. Marshall to dine here; he will enjoy being with his mother, I am sure."

Still Katherine hesitated. She must return these courtesies if she accepted them, and how could she? No, she must not stay. Then Marguerite returned, saying Mrs. Wells would stay if Katherine thought best, and then, just in time to turn the scale in favor of the delay, John came galloping up the drive, and throwing the reins to Andy, hurried up the steps with the freedom of which he gladly availed himself since his mother's arrival. His buoyant, happy, almost triumphant bearing seemed to change the aspect of everything. Portia appealed to him. Would n't he persuade his friend and her mother to remain? Ah, would n't he though! And remain they did, and dined at the new boarding-house, although they would have been terrified that morning at the thought of doing so.

Mrs. Marshall seldom appeared with the other guests, until they gathered in the dining-room in the evening, and then she was always closely attended by the French maid, bearing her cushions, her fan, and lace shawls, and mysterious black bag. She never spoke to one of the servants, but made all her wants known to Clare, who in turn repeated them to the waitress. John never had known her to be quite so formal. Influenced by her presence, the other guests unconsciously assumed an air of dignity and distance, at once elegant and oppressive.

Portia felt that the easy geniality hitherto pervading her household, was gone. She would not allow herself to be daunted, however, but went about among them, with their many whims and smallnesses, regulating affairs in the gentle way that won every one, yet holding her head like the queen she was, complete mistress of herself and of her household. John watched her moving about, speaking to each with gracious care, and again as she served coffee at the little table, with the light from the tall lamp playing over her hair, and the dear small Juliet at her elbow, and to him her presence was the all-pervading one — the only presence in that great old room, where in childhood he had hidden himself away, and watched lovely ladies in glistening foreign silks, rustling and fanning and chattering about him. Portia, in simple white, with a touch of lilac tulle at her throat and wrists, her graceful head a-tilt over the cups and saucers, seemed to him the epitome of all the grace and beauty, the graciousness and queenliness, the gentleness and femininity that the great old drawing-room had ever held in its heart in

all the hundred years of its existence. Ah, it was a proud little head, but had it not rested on his bosom? and the soft tint in her cheeks, had he not seen it deepen for him? So it was he of all the guests who was at that moment consciously and supremely happy.

Marguerite drew a hassock to Mrs. Wells' feet. "I will sit here," she said, "where you can touch me if you wish for anything. I am glad you stayed, for now you can hear Miss Van Ostade sing. Oh, she sings charmingly, and they have other music also."

"And you, too, sing charmingly, I have no doubt."

"Ah, not as she does, do I, Aunt Isabel?"

"She certainly sings well for one who has had no advantages, — has never been abroad, you know."

"She has been abroad, mother," said John, bending over her chair, and speaking in a low tone. "It was in Germany that I first saw her, and she got her pronunciation of Italian in Italy."

"You first saw her in Germany!" exclaimed Mrs. Marshall, sharply.

Portia could not help hearing the words and guessing their import. She was trying to extinguish the flame of the lamp under the shining urn at her side, and an awkward movement of her hand caused her to drop the cover and burn her fingers.

Hanford Clark stepped quickly forward and picking up the little brass disk placed it over the blaze. "Let me take these cups for you," he said. "Mrs. Wells has none; shall I take them? Ah! you have burned yourself."

"It is nothing," she bit her lip in her vexation, "only my awkwardness."

Armed with his errand, he took himself to Marguerite's side. "Won't you introduce me to your friend?" he said.

"Gladly. Have n't you met her in all the time you have been here? Mrs. Wells, this is Mr. Clark, — John's friend, you know. He has brought your coffee."

"John's friend? Then I should know him," she held out her hand, and he placed the cup in it. "No, it is your hand I want. I am blind, and it is only by the touch of your hand and the sound of your voice that I may know you," she said pleasantly.

"Then you are spared all unpleasant sights," he said. He drew a chair near, and began conversing quietly. Presently he turned to Marguerite, "That was kind of you to introduce me as John's friend." He spoke in an undertone, during the confused buzz of general conversation about them.

"Have you met her daughter? She is talking to Mr. Russell. Is n't she like an old picture, the way she dresses her hair?"

"Charming."

"Then, why did you go right by us there in the garden, if you think so? Mr. Held did not, and he had less reason for stopping than you, — not being so old an acquaintance, I mean."

"Sometimes the newest acquaintances are the most agreeable."

"Of course, sometimes. Was that why you passed me by?"

"Marguerite, are you going to tantalize me into doing what I promised you I would not?"

"Oh," whispered Marguerite, "the pretty blond plays the cornet," she looked toward the piano where Mr. Vedder stood with a French horn in his hand, and Mrs. Clare was turning her music.

Portia escaped from the room, and leaned against one of the pillars of the verandah. Her hand smarted with the burn, and her heart with the sting of that sentence which she had heard, and the tone of displeased surprise, and almost of contempt which it seemed to contain for her. "Oh, if she would only go away!" she thought. "She hates me, and she always will. She is cruel, wicked, to hate me for what I could not help." Then she bethought that Mrs. Marshall could not know of her precious secret yet, and she was unjust. Yes, she would keep on trying to win her, but she was sick of all the distasteful life she was leading. She felt that she ought to go back and talk to Miss Katherine, and say pleasant things to a little lady who had but just arrived, but how could she go about saying affable things in this mood, and with the consciousness of those critical eyes on her, — that languid, watchful look, that seemed to be indifferent, yet was so catlike and intent after all. She heard the wheeze of the cornet, struggling with one of her songs, and she pulled impatiently at the jasmine vine, crushing the flowers in her hands. She heard a step near, but did not move. She hoped it might be John, but it was not.

"Ah, you are in hiding, I see. I missed you from the circle in there. When you go, the soul of the place is gone, and I always escape myself."

Portia started at the sound of the voice, and, turn-

ing sharply, looked, with an almost pitiful expression of entreaty, into the face of her silver-haired lover. The look was a silent entreaty from her heart to be let alone, but his interpretation of it was different. "You are weary. No wonder you hide."

"Indeed, no. I am only enjoying the fresh air."

"Let me fetch you a chair, and enjoy it also." He placed two chairs just beyond the light which streamed from the window. "Now, this is charming, to sit here and listen to the music," he rubbed his hands together with hearty satisfaction.

"He plays off the key," she said with a little nervous laugh.

"Yes, yes. A sensitive ear must suffer. There is where we coarser organizations have a certain advantage. Now to me that music is agreeable, but I see its defects, of course. When I judge of music, I can judge truly." He added hastily, "I would not have you to think I judge of your music as I do of this, for instance. No, no. That is different entirely." The lamp inside was moved at this moment, and the rays fell on his beautiful hair, and illumined his face. "Now yours is music. Oh, the pity of it, that you should be shut up here with your talent, your genius, and only selfish people get the benefit of it! You should sing for the whole world. You should go abroad, and then come home and bring the world to your feet. You should —"

"Oh, Mr. Russell, it is like hearing a romance, but I must not dream of such things, nor even listen to you. At this very minute I ought to be looking after the comfort of my guests. To sit here chatting does not fit my position." She rose to go.

"Your position go hang," he said with vehemence. "This is not your position, — I beg pardon, but you should be in a position I have in mind for you, — one that is fitted for you. This is all — "

Portia sank back trembling into the chair, without strength to move. What could she do? How could she stop him? She must, — but he went on.

"That is right. This is not your position, it is all wrong. Miss Van Ostade, I have sought this opportunity for weeks. Sometimes I almost thought you avoided me, but that it stood to reason you could not give all your time to an old man, when there are so many younger claimants."

"Oh, Mr. Russell, it was never your age, never," she paused. Was it possible that in her endeavor to be kind, she had not made the true reason of her avoidance clear to him?

"I understand; no, no. Certainly not; and I am not so old, neither. My heart is young as any man's. Miss Van Ostade, my heart is at your feet. I can make possible all the dreams I have laid before you and more. Let me make you mistress of my home, and place my fortune in your hands. There is no one to dispute your right. Miss Van Ostade, I can command my millions, yet without you they are worthless to me. Just let me enumerate to you — "

"I can't listen to you; I must not. I was out of my senses to sit here and let you talk to me like this."

"Just a word, a word; I am not so old as my white hair would indicate, — as you may think, — and I bring you a cleaner record and a purer heart than

many a younger man. Let me urge you. Think of all I might be able to do for your happiness, for your most charming mother. While now you have cares without number, all would be lifted from you, and your path be strewn with roses. We would travel, and revel in the wonders of the old world, and your mother would grow young again, — so also would your grandfather. I realize his worth. I feel what you in your pride would say to this; but is it right, is it reasonable that you should throw away their happiness as well as mine, by a refusal?"

"Mr. Russell, I am not to be bought and sold," she said, rising to her feet, and looking at him as she had not dared before. Noting the pain in his face, instantly her pride and resentment changed to a feeling of gratitude and genuine sorrow. "Forgive me for those words; they were too harsh." She seated herself, and leaning on the arm of her chair brought her face nearer his. "You deserve a different answer. Will you be satisfied if I give you a glimpse into my heart? It is but fair, since I have allowed you to say this to me. I cannot give you what only a true woman should give to the man she would marry. You are too good a man to be so treated, or to wish me anything but happiness. I cannot give you my heart; it is not mine. I love some one else very deeply. This is a confidence which now you alone of all the world have. Even my mother, I have kept it from her. You will understand now why I should avoid you; it is not your age, it is not yourself, believe me. It is, it — Oh, why should this be? Why should you care so much? There are lovely women who are famishing

for just such true love as you have laid at my feet. Why should such treasure be offered me (I am not worthy of it), and they be denied?"

The old man made no answer. He sat with his head bowed in his hands, stunned. He had not thought a refusal possible. He had passed the last few weeks in one long dream of happiness, and now the shock seemed rude indeed. At last Portia could not bear the silence and spoke again, trying to make her refusal seem more gracious.

"I could have given you all you ask, if it were not for this greater love, believe me, I could. There are many more worthy than I; won't you give to some one else the treasure I must not have, and so bring blessedness to yourself as well as to another?"

"Miss Van Ostade, there is but one woman in the world for me." He rose, took her hand in his for a moment, and then bending low over it kissed it. "Pardon me," he said, and turning abruptly left her.

CHAPTER XXI

MARGUERITE SETS THE FASHION

AS the season wore along, guests flocked to the old home from the far South, while a few of the Northern boarders remained the summer through; and it was not long before Portia could count among the inmates of the house individuals who had gathered from the four quarters of the globe. The air of reserve and criticism which had entered the place with the advent of Mrs. Marshall soon passed. It had swept through the little gathering like a contagious disease, worn itself out, and was gone, before the more oblivious of the guests knew it had been among them. Although protesting she had never been so wretchedly situated in her life, Mrs. Marshall settled herself for the summer in the pleasant rooms which had been prepared especially for her comfort.

"It is more the service than it is the rooms," she complained to John one day as he waited at her door, lingering until he should hear Portia's step in the hall below, for the sake of a touch of her hand as he passed out. He seldom could get a word with her these busy days.

"The service! Why, I have seen Miss Van Ostade bringing you things with her own hands."

His mother laughed. "You seem to think that the greatest honor that could happen to any one. It

only shows she is no lady. She should send a maid. It would be far pleasanter for me, I am sure."

"Well, there's no accounting for tastes," he said with a shrug.

"So I think, at least for yours."

"I must go," he said hurriedly. He thought he heard Portia's step in the lower hall. "I have a man on to decorate the grand salon at the hotel to-day, so I may not be in again. He is a wonder at the work; you must try to drive over and see it. Good-bye."

He found Portia at the far end of the piazza trying to put up a hammock that had been broken down the night before.

"Good-morning, good-morning. What are you trying to do?" he said cheerily, taking the hammer from her hand. "Now, where do you wish this put? Here where it was before? Why you can't do it with this; you need an auger and bit."

"Yes, I see I do. Never mind; I will wait until grandfather comes." The wail of his violin floated down to them from an upper window. She pushed the hammock from her with a little sigh. She was tired that morning in brain and body. She did not glance up, for she felt his eyes on her and knew the wistful look in them. "I did not know you were here," she said, standing a little apart and slowly winding her handkerchief about her hand. He pulled it gently off and disclosed a great red bruise across her fingers, and his heart was touched. His mother's bitter words still rung in his ears. "She shows she is no lady by doing such things;" and their injustice and cruelty stung him. He flung the

hammer over the piazza railing and seized her hands almost savagely.

"Portia, these are mine; you are mine. You shall not be doing these things when I am here to prevent. I say these hands are mine, and all this work must stop. It is cruel." She grew white to the lips, and tried weakly to pull her hands away. He raised the bruised fingers and kissed them. "Say it shall stop," he said tenderly.

"Oh, John, I can't. I see no way to stop. I must keep on, perhaps for years. There is no one else for them to depend on, and they must not know of this; I must keep on if it kills me, and you — " She bit her lip to keep back the tears and regain self-control.

"And I?" He bent over her, looking into her eyes, but she kept them fixed on the distant hills, and tried again to release her hands.

"I cannot ask you to wait for me; it is too much. Oh, John, let everything be as it was, — as if — it never had happened."

"As if what never had happened?"

"Oh, you know. Don't look at me. Let me have my hands to cover my face."

"Portia, tell me what has happened." She was silent. All the world was silent. No flutter of a leaf, nor twitter of a bird, — only the distant plaint of her grandfather's violin, as if to keep her in mind of her obligations. The earth slept in the warm morning sun. His mother, reclining on her couch with the shades drawn, was slowly fanning herself and listening to Clare reading aloud, a French novel, in her native tongue.

"Tell me, Portia," he said again exultantly, "what has happened? I want to hear it from your lips, over and over, or sing it to me. It is fit for music, — our hearts are full of it. Come, or I will kiss you again as I did that morning."

Portia gave a half-frightened look around. "No, no, John; give me back my hands. Some one — your mother's maid might be — might see you. I seem to feel her eyes on me all the time lately, wherever I am."

"They are making you miserable with their whims. They shall not stay here, if I have to leave the place myself. This is downright deviltry. I'll —"

"No, no; if I cannot win her, I am not worthy of you. She cannot help her prejudices, and — well — if you were to tell her now what you have done, without giving me time to overcome them, she will never forgive you, and there will be an end."

"Portia! Let my mother come between you and me? Never. She has not controlled my life in the past; why should she now?"

The cat lay on the railing, with her forepaws curled in, sleepily blinking at them. Portia turned away from her lover and gently stroked pussy's fur, and laid her flushed cheek against it before she replied. She could not understand how one so warm-hearted and impulsive could stand in such relations to his mother, and it troubled her.

"But she is your mother, and you love her, and she is so frail. If this would make her miserable, we never could build up our happiness on such a foundation."

"You are an angel, and ordinary mortals cannot keep up with you. But, Portia, I can't look at this as you would have me. I tell you no one is going to be made miserable unless it be you and I, if I should listen to you. When the summer is over, if mother is — if you have not succeeded, my beautiful, promise me that no earthly thing or being shall stand between us. Promise me!"

"John, I do love you, oh, I do. Isn't that enough — till then?"

"Give me the promise too, quick!" he said, seizing the hands she impulsively held out to him. "Some one is coming over the hill yonder, — some of your precious boarders riding back. Listen. There is no one on earth who can come between you and me. You must not think I do not love my mother, — I do; but she shall not come between us; and as for your own, if you are happy, they will be. You think they have no one to turn to who would care for them so lovingly? That is because you do not half believe in me, Portia. Don't look at that cloud of dust; look in my eyes and see how I love you."

"I believe in you as I believe in my own soul, John. It is not that. I can give myself to you, but not them. I must keep right on doing my work — for a time at least."

"I will not torment your conscience any more, sweetheart. Go on doing your work in your own brave way, but, hark, when the summer is over, before another year is begun, I am going to marry you, love, in this house where I was born. If mother becomes reconciled, well and good; if not,

she may go to — Cuba, as she usually does, and leave me to my own way. My will is as strong as hers, and you are the sweetest woman in the world, and you are mine. There! kiss me. You can't help yourself. They are coming now. Good-bye."

As he rode rapidly away, he saw Clare throw open the blind of his mother's wide French window, opening onto the upper gallery of the piazza. She stepped quietly out, and leaning over the railing looked down on Portia, standing among the honeysuckle vines in her simple white dress, and saw her blow a kiss at him, lifting the bruised hand to her lips, — the hand he had kissed. He returned the gentle salute, and then with a backward glance at the maid above rode on. A moment later, the guests whom they had watched a few minutes before turning a distant curve, came galloping up the drive, and Clare re-entered her mistress's room.

"Who rode away just now?" said Mrs. Marshall.

"Ce votre fils, madam."

"Was he alone?"

The maid lifted her shoulders. "Je suppose, madam; he rode le seul."

"Yes, yes. But — he must have waited for some reason; was there no one below?"

"Oh, oui. Je pense, de mees, que keeps dis place, la."

"The hussy! Where was she?"

"Elle caress le chat, — le pussee." Through the feminine instinct of helping on a love affair, and partly through natural kindness of heart, Clare purposed to give only as much information as would

satisfy her mistress, and kept her lips discreetly closed on the rest. Moreover, she felt that John Marshall fully comprehended the situation and knew she had been sent to look just when she did, and she would not be compromised in his eyes. She would be able to defend herself, should he speak of it.

"I will go down, Clare; bring me the loose gown with the lace. No, not that one; the white with black lace. It is too warm for anything else."

Marguerite came bounding into the little sitting-room beyond and threw herself upon the couch in her habit. "Oh, it is so warm!" she said, fanning her flushed face.

"Then why do you ride in such heat?"

"Oh, but we had a glorious time. Mr. Held is just handsome on horseback. He looks better than he does off, like Napoleon. If he were only a little taller, he would be handsome, anyway."

"John was in asking for you. He seemed surprised that I should allow you to go off in this way with any one you happen to pick up at a boarding-house. Why don't you go with him ever, these days?"

"Why don't I? How can I? He is so taken up with his old hotel. He would better look after himself a little, I think." She bit her lip and glanced quickly at her aunt and then at the maid, who was standing behind her gently brushing the long gray hair, still plentifully sprinkled with black. Clare, answering the glance, lightly touched her closed lips with her finger. Ah, quick-tempered little Marguerite! she had sent a shaft she had not intended.

"Look after himself? What do you mean?" said Mrs. Marshall, sharply.

"I mean what I say. He need n't be looking after me and criticising me. He acts just as he did in Europe, tormenting me almost to death with his superior ways. If that hotel and two or three hundred workmen are n't enough for him to attend to here, I would like to know. Oh, that makes me think — we are going to have a lot of fun. The dining-room there is all finished and cleared, and John has sent for music, — good music, you know, — and we are to have a dance to-morrow night. Just ourselves, and a few of the nice, real old families around here.. Mr. Chaplain knows them all, so he invites them, you know. He and John are giving it themselves, only Miss Van Ostade is to send over the refreshments. She gets her supplies from some big place somewhere. She is a perfect angel."

"Very charming, certainly, but that is her business, you know."

"You are so cold, aunt. I say she is lovely."

"Very true; it is her business to be so. Think what she must make out of us."

"Oh, hum! I can't, for the life of me, see why she should be so different from everybody else just because she keeps boarders. Anyway, her business will be gone as soon as the new hotel is opened."

"Oh, no. There are plenty of stupid people who would rather come to a place of this kind."

"But you don't take any interest in the dance, aunt. I tell you, it will be swell. Let's see: there are forty boarders here, and there will be at least as

many more from outside; John says there will be about a hundred people there, the swellest kind of people."

"And some who are not so swell."

"Oh, of course. Mr. Held has asked me for the first dance and the last, so you see — "

"I see. All graver interests must stand aside now, for a while, for Mr. Held."

"Certainly, for a while, you know."

"Marguerite, are you never going to be in earnest?"

"Yes, aunt. I am very serious now. I am going to teach him a valuable lesson."

"One of these days you will find you have made a grave mistake, Marguerite. I — "

"Oh, aunt, don't preach. I like scolding better. You look so handsome when you scold, — as if you could thrust a stiletto into your lover's heart, and so forth. I think I will write a novel, aunt, just to put you in it. You would make a splendid — "

"Marguerite, don't chatter. You look so warm in that habit; take it off and put on a thin dress."

She sprang up and kissed her aunt. "Much better advice than you were going to give, aunt dear, and I will take it. I won't wear this habit any more when I ride; I will wear a gingham dress and a black sunbonnet, as the natives do around here."

"Oh, mademoiselle, je proteste," exclaimed Clare, holding up both hands.

"That is right, Clare; you look well when you are protesting."

"Mais, j'implore! Votre beautiful light blue ginkham, vis ze lace, ze ribonne, I can never put her

on you more, ven you haf gone on le cheval wis ze dress."

"Not that one; don't be troubled. I am going to get a plaid gingham at Mr. Hackett's general store, and you may make it up for me. That and a great white apron and a black sunbonnet, — that is the fashion here in America, Clare. You know you like to be in the fashion."

"Oui, mademoiselle, mais je n'aime pas this fashion ci."

Marguerite was as good as her word, and Clare, amid mock tears and protestations, fashioned the dress with her deft fingers, which her young mistress wore with bewitching grace on all her mountain excursions for the rest of the season. Indeed, her example was followed by all the women boarders who dared risk their charms in such a costume; and Mr. Hackett was obliged to lay in a new stock of gingham to supply the native trade.

CHAPTER XXII

CONFIDENCES

NOTHING was talked of but the prospective dance at the lunch tables that day.

"Your daughter will be overtired if she has the refreshments to look after, in addition to all she has to care for here," said a pleasant old lady to Mrs. Van Ostade.

"The ladies have very kindly offered to assist, and Miss Wells will be over this afternoon. They will divide the duties among them."

At Portia's table the matter of refreshments was being discussed *sotto voce*, until Mrs. Barry's clear tones struck an anxious chord with the words, "No celery! but what are we to do for salad?"

"Why can't we get some? You get it, Miss Van Ostade; we had it yesterday," chimed in Miss Keller.

"Mine is gone, and we have no time to order more," replied Portia, in a low voice; and the conversation dropped to its former undertone.

"Oh, I see."

"Well, then, what's to be done?"

"Substitute something else."

"Oh, no. We must have salad, and we must have celery," said Mrs. Barry.

"We will think about it and contrive," said Portia. "Certainly we should have it."

As they passed out, to gather on the piazza, Hanford Clark stepped to Portia's side.

"Can I help you?" he asked. "I knew a man who used to raise it, only he lives over at the Gap."

"Yes," said Mr. Ridgeway; "a man by the name of Homer raises it, but it would mean a ride of fully twenty-four miles, there and back. We might send a boy, unless the horse is needed here, Portia."

Marguerite came and slipped her arm about Portia's waist. "What is it?" she said.

"It is what is n't," said Portia, giving a caressing touch to Marguerite's hair. "We are speaking of what we shall regale ourselves withal, at the dance to-morrow night. There is no celery for the salad."

"Scour the mountains. Send couriers in all directions to hunt for celery," said Mr. Held.

"That is grandfather's suggestion."

"There is an English gardener stranded over at the Gap," said Hanford.

"That is the place to go, then," said Mr. Betts. "We might make up a party, and ride over. How far is it?"

"Twelve miles or near it," said Hanford. "I will go if you wish, Miss Van Ostade; I shall not be at the station for the rest of the day."

"You must not spend all your leisure doing errands for me, you have so little."

"Oh, but this is for all, and if I had company on the trip —"

Marguerite was as well aware of the quick glance he sent in her direction as if she had seen it. Mr.

Held was talking to her, and she was looking in his face. Hanford did not hear what he was saying, but his own face darkened, and he turned away as he heard her reply.

"Yes, we had an awfully good time, but I had a lecture from aunt when we got home for going with you this morning, so I dare not try it so soon again; anyway, I am tired, and it is hot."

"Then may I ask what you are intending to do the rest of the day?" Mr. Held still spoke in an undertone.

"Oh, I don't know. I usually do what I don't expect to do, so if I could tell you, you would be none the wiser."

Hanford moved away to avoid overhearing further, and accosted Mrs. Barry, who sat under a network of vines, embroidering and chatting with Mrs. Van Ostade. "I don't know that I blame them," she was saying. "Mrs. Wells tells me the rising generation are an utterly irresponsible class, — absolutely good for nothing."

"Portia has managed to find a use for some of them. Of course they needed training," said the elder woman.

"Ah, but that is Portia, not the rising generation. She could make sticks and stones rise up and do her bidding. But you know they all will steal."

"I suppose they came up with the notion that everything they could lay hands on was theirs, and that their masters' goods were their own, by right of their working without pay."

"May I join you?" said Hanford, seating himself on the piazza railing.

"We shall be delighted," said Mrs. Van Ostade. "Draw up that large chair. You are not comfortable so."

"I am very happy here," he said, in polite fiction, for he was at that moment most miserable, as Marguerite chattered and laughed with the young artist, who was preparing to work on a sketch of her head, begun the day before, while the other guests looked on.

"Of course he is," said Mrs. Barry. "Men are always most happy when they are uncomfortable. Why do you ask him to take an easy-chair when he is so pleasantly uncomfortable where he is?"

Hanford laughed. "I am very well off here, and in no mood for an easy-chair. You are right."

"We were talking of the negro nuisance, so to speak. I think they are the curse of the South."

"As they have always been," he responded. "A unique opinion for a Northern woman to hold."

"I know, but I hold it all the same. There are two sides to the question, and I am sure Mr. Barry will agree with me when he comes down. I don't blame people of the South for their feeling towards them."

"You don't think it possible for them to be educated into responsible members of society, then?"

"They would have to be educated a thousand years before I would be willing to admit them to my society."

"And then you would be rather old for society," said Portia, who had joined them and stood by her mother's chair. "Mamma deary, here is your

tonic. I found it by your plate. You forgot it this noon."

Mrs. Van Ostade took the tiny glass, and the look she gave her daughter was pathetic in its tenderness. Portia stooped and kissed her lightly on the cheek, and touched the fine gray hair, and arranged the lace at her neck. "I must pet mamma now and then," she said with a slight flush, as she caught Hanford's eyes fixed on her with smiling regard.

"I think we are all inclined to envy you the privilege," he said gallantly. "And now," he glanced at his watch, "would you like me to drive over to the Gap for you, or are they going to make up a party, as Mr. Betts proposed?"

"No, no one else is going; but it is a shame to let you drive away over there, just at a venture, this hot afternoon."

"It will give me the greatest pleasure. I will start immediately."

"If you go now, you will be back for dinner, will you not?"

"I may possibly wait until the cool of the evening before I drive home."

"It will be far pleasanter," said Mrs. Van Ostade.

"Good-bye, then, until to-night. By the way, what have you on for this evening?"

"Nothing much," said Portia.

"Indeed, we are to picnic over there on the lawn where the trees with the seats are, and the negroes are to give us a concert," said Mrs. Barry.

"I didn't think Mr. Clark would care for that."

"I always enjoy your little impromptu events, and I most certainly will return in time."

As he approached the group near the artist, Marguerite looked up, and his eyes met hers with a grave look. He said nothing, and scarcely glanced at the sketch as he passed.

"He need n't be so cross," she thought. "I don't care. He may snub me all he likes, but he sha'n't rule me. I will do what I please." She pouted, and for an instant forgot artist, sketch, the guests who clustered around, and even her own important part. She was with Hanford again in the coolness and shadows as she was on that first evening. "I don't care," she said to herself, but she did care.

"Ah, I am losing likeness, I fear," said the artist, impatiently. "Or her expression has all changed. Miss McLourie, will you have the kindness to — there, that is better. The expression you wore a moment ago, please. The shade of a smile, and the lips slightly parted — "

"Mr. Held thinks, evidently, that my expressions are Paris made, to put off and on like my hats. Thank you, sir. Very complimentary, surely."

"Now — no, Miss McLourie. That really is too bad. Just tip your head a little, please. Ah! I had such a beautiful pose here."

"Such a beautiful pose, Miss McLourie; pray don't spoil it," chimed in Miss Keller.

"Are you nearly through? I am so warm and thirsty."

All were too intent to heed her little complaint, so, flushed and a trifle impatient, she tipped her pretty head and sat still. Presently she rose.

"You surely will spare me for a moment; I am going for a fan. This heat is intolerable;" and

before the gentlemen had time to beg her pardon for their thoughtlessness, she was gone.

Mr. Held hurriedly dashed in a little background and drapery during her absence. In the long hall she met Hanford with a glass of water. "I heard you say you were thirsty after I passed, a moment ago," he said.

"I was dying for a glass of water, and they did n't one of them care. Thank you."

"Naturally they forget everything when they have you before them with the privilege of dissecting your loveliness."

"It is n't nice of you to put it so."

"No, it is n't nice, I know; but — Marguerite, don't run away from me — I only want a word; come back again."

"I am going for my fan," she said, tapping impatiently on the step with her foot and leaning over the railing; "speak to me here."

"I am going over to Pine Gap in the light rig. Will you go? It will be cooler in an hour, and delightful. Must I go alone?" He mounted the stair with his long legs three steps at a time, and stood beside her.

"Why, no, not necessarily; you can ask some one else; I have promised this sitting now."

"Marguerite." She looked at him with a defiant flash in her eyes. "Give me a privilege now and then. I am keeping my promise, am I not?"

"You have immense privileges. No one dare say what you said to me a moment since; and as for keeping your promise, you either ignore me entirely or look at me as if — as if — " she paused.

"Go on, please; how do I look?"

"You contrive in some way to make me feel guilty, as if I had been stealing, or —"

He smiled. "I never meant to arraign you for a little thief, though you have stolen from me. I don't want it back, only something more precious instead. There, don't run; I am keeping my promise, and I ask for nothing but this drive and a dance to-morrow night. Give me two, the first and the last. You grant that much to strangers."

"But those two are both promised."

His face darkened. "And you won't drive with me?"

"I can't. I am keeping Mr. Held waiting as it is. My loveliness is to be still further dissected by a crowd of boarders; there will be nothing left of it by the time you return. There, that is too bad! Don't frown." She darted on up the dingy old stairway, a dream in a cloud of sheer white and rose-colored ribbons, pausing only at the top to look down out of the obscurity and shoot one more little arrow into his poor foolish heart. "I am glad to be free, and do just as I please. Farewell," and she was gone like a bird escaped from the snare. An impulse of tenderness seized her the next moment, and she tiptoed back to the stairway and looked down; but he was gone. "Well, I don't care," she said once more to herself, but she did care. Ah, if he had known how much!

She hurried to her room, snatched up an antique fan, and flew back to her seat on the piazza, where she was welcomed by a chorus of voices. A few

minutes later she saw Hanford Clark drive away, but he did not look up.

Sketching was not mere pastime with Mr. Anton Helvetius Held. He had travelled much, and studied hard, was an indefatigable worker, and mightily ambitious. It was his dream to make his mark in the world both at home and abroad. The interest of the moment was of small consequence to him, and the remarks of extravagant praise bestowed on him now, as he worked, touched him not at all, except as they revealed to him some defect or weakness, when he grasped at the hint (given him mostly in ignorance), eagerly profiting thereby. For this reason he gladly displayed his sketches, gaining thus a reputation for extreme affability, and would sit smilingly by, listening to the comments of even the least artistic, if perchance some hint might be dropped which he could seize and work out later. Alert, humorous, and quietly receptive, he yet lacked the one element to secure success, — the power to perceive through spiritual insight. Too self-centred to allow his soul to reach toward and come in touch with other souls, he lost the divine impetus which might have made him great.

He would have left Patterson a month ago, but that the place was suddenly imbued with new interest for him by the arrival of Mrs. Marshall and her ward. He would paint the beautiful brunette, and in three days' time had so far ingratiated himself with Aunt Isabel that he might have had the privilege of painting her portrait also. Marguerite's piquancy peculiarly attracted him, and ere two

weeks had passed, seeing her daily, chatting, riding, driving, or walking with her, never alone with her, yet always in her company, and flirting with her in the evening and all the time, he had come to believe himself seriously in love. To-day, as he worked on, touching the delicate lines of chin and throat and cheek, he felt for the first time in his thirty years of existence the subtile, baffling power of the spirit.

"Something eludes me here," he ejaculated, "yet these lines are certainly correct."

"Why, Mr. Held, they are perfect," exclaimed Miss Keller, who had begun to pay decided court to that gentleman.

Marguerite laughed. "Don't you wish I were a mountain, or a heap of green stones with the moss on them? Mr. Held paints stones to perfection. You see, they never think nor care for anything, so he does not have to paint what he cannot see."

"Miss Van Ostade," he said, seeing her in the doorway, "you have not seen this for some time, and can tell the better for that. Are we losing likeness here?"

Portia felt hurried, but came smilingly across to the interested group. "I am no artist, Mr. Held." She stopped and hesitated before the drawing. "It seems —"

"Don't speak until you have taken time to look at it, pray. Now, why is it unlike?"

"I would not call it unlike. It seems very correct."

"That is what I tell him, very correct," echoed Miss Keller.

Portia brought her head down to a level with the artist's, to see his model from his point of view. "Yes, it is certainly like, but—"

"Ah, there it is, but something eludes me."

"What is it, do you think, that eludes you?" she asked, looking gravely in Mr. Held's face. With the sure instinct of her own seeing soul, she knew why he failed, yet felt powerless to help him, unless she could awaken in him the insight by which spirit recognizes spirit. "I presume the mere intellectual perception of outward things goes but a little way in art," she went on gently; "that may be a good reason why we who are not artists should not pass judgment."

"I think it is perfectly wonderful, and a likeness too. Now is n't it, Mr. Betts?" said Miss Keller.

"Certainly the likeness is good, and the technique is more than good. I like your handling, Mr. Held."

The artist remained silent, his arms dropped at his side, alternately eying first his model and then the picture.

"What is it eludes you?" asked Portia again.

"I don't know. You tell me. You can do it."

"He is trying to grasp at airy nothing, and finds it hard to catch," said Marguerite. "I will wager you he has put in the picture everything he sees in my face, and is only provoked that there is nothing more."

"Miss McLourie, a thousand things are omitted," he exclaimed, snatching up his brushes and going eagerly to work.

"Now, Mr. Held, you will surely spoil it," said Portia. "Don't try to paint until you are sure of

what you wish to do. Besides, Miss McLourie is weary; I see it in her eyes."

"I beg pardon if you are tired. I did not notice it."

"No? Maybe that was what eluded you," said Marguerite, teasingly; "but now if you have seen it in my eyes, as Miss Van Ostade has, I will sit a little longer while you put it in."

"Ah, but I do not want a look of weariness. Anything but that," he said, painting on slowly.

"I don't wonder it is impossible," said Mrs. Marshall, shaking out her laces, and viewing the work through her hand to shut off surrounding objects. "I particularly wished this to be a likeness, not a fancy picture. Marguerite, can't you keep the same expression for two minutes; can't you be more reposeful? But it is not so bad. Haven't you flattered her a little, made her too classic in the drawing?"

"Oh, Mr. Held! How cruel, to make a guy of me! I hate classic features." She pouted, and glanced at him askance. Portia, seeing she was really tired and annoyed at being publicly analyzed, made a little gesture, which Marguerite gladly accepted. She sprang up, all her languor gone in a moment. "I am going with Miss Van Ostade, to help her. Miss Katherine and Mrs. Barry are helping, why cannot I?"

"Marguerite!" exclaimed her aunt.

"I know, aunt, but Mr. Held can't do anything more until he finds out what eludes him. You finish the sitting and tell him what it is." And they went away together.

"You naughty one, but how I love you! I don't wonder your aunt wishes the picture to be like you; I do, too," said Portia, laughing.

"He never will make it like me. If he had any sense, he would paint you. There is five times more in your face than in mine, just as there is in what you say and in your voice, only he is too stupid to see it, and you are really more beau —"

"Hush, hush!" Portia put her arm around the little body and drew her close. "You are tired and annoyed. Come and hide from them all in our own little sitting-room, mamma's and grandfather's and mine." She led the way out of the hall to the rear piazza, and thence, up an outside stairway, to a small room in the far end of the ell addition, having an outlook on three sides. Here white curtains floated out into the room with the breeze that swept through it, and everything seemed white and cool.

"Oh, what a sweet room! I did n't know there was such a pretty spot in the whole house."

"No? It is a dingy old house, so I fitted this up with pretty things for mamma. Poor mamma! she always used to have pretty things around her. I never took any one up here before, for it is my place of escape when I need to be alone with her. I could not be patient and strong but for this little resting-place."

"Then you are awfully good to let me in. Why do you do it? I shall be sure to want to come again."

"That is why. Do you know you are very beautiful, and I love you? You have had that said to

you hundreds of times, and it has not spoiled you, so I may say it again, and do no harm."

"It would have spoiled me but for one thing," she sighed, and turning away leaned on the wide window-ledge, and looked out over the forest at the blue mountain-top rising dimly in the distance.

"What is the one thing?" said Portia, going to her side. "I see many reasons why you are not spoiled."

"Can you? It is good of you to care to find them. No one else does. If you will call me Marguerite, as John does, I will tell you something."

"Marguerite, you beautiful girl, look at me." Portia bent her head and looked into the great velvety eyes, and they were full of tears. "Why, you darling!" she said, taking her in her arms, and putting her cheek against hers with a caressing touch, "why, you darling, sit beside me here and tell me what it is."

"It is nothing. Sometimes I am lonely, that is all. You think I have everything. I am rich and beautiful, that is, to look at, but you don't see how that shuts me out from every one. If my mother had lived, I am sure she would have loved me for something else, for myself."

"You beautiful little woman, we all love you for something else. You are lovely and lovable, without and within."

"No, I am not. If I were ugly to look at, you would not say these things to me. If I were even commonplace-looking like Miss — well, never mind, do you think they would be painting my picture, or teasing me to drive with them or to dance with

them to-morrow evening? No, it is as Aunt Isabel says; there is only John who cares for me without caring whether I am rich or pretty, and she is determined to have me marry him. Don't tremble so. I am not going to do it."

"Miss McLourie!"

She lifted her head from Portia's breast and looked in her eyes, laughing through her own tears. "Call me Marguerite again, or I won't go on," she touched Portia's cheeks with her finger. "The red is all gone from here. I did n't mean to make you turn pale."

"Marguerite, don't!" The blood rushed back into Portia's face in a painful blush.

"Don't care. You need n't. It was n't your fault. I saw it in his eyes the first thing, and he should n't have been so stupid as to try to hide it from me, either." She nestled her head down again, and began playing with the ribbons at Portia's belt.

"You don't know Aunt Isabel yet, but when she makes up her mind, she would overturn that mountain yonder before she would give up. Of course I like John, but if I should marry him — why — I would hate him before the honeymoon was over, and he would me." She paused and drew the long lilac ribbons through her fingers, while Portia waited with beating heart for her to go on.

"Marguerite," she said at last, "tell me all that is in your heart. Has it been making you sad, — that, that you saw in his eyes? Tell me truly." The arm that clasped Marguerite's waist trembled in spite of herself. She feared she knew not what.

"Made me sad? It is the very thing I have been hoping for. He might have had the sense to fall in love with some one long ago, and that would have left me free. Aunt Isabel could n't have helped herself then." She took Portia's hand, and drew the trembling arm closer about her waist. "Love me," she said.

"I do, Marguerite; you creep into my heart as if you belonged there."

"You were in a hurry a minute ago, and I know I am keeping you."

"I was, but it has passed over."

"I annoyed you by what I said, but was n't it best to be frank?"

"Yes, darling."

"Then why don't you be frank too?"

"About what shall I be frank? You have said you know, so what can I say?"

"Say whether you love him."

"I can't, Marguerite; that is more than I have said even to my mother."

"Never mind. I can feel whether you do or not in the very tips of your fingers."

"You have n't told me yet what troubled you, dear." Portia kissed the warm, flushed cheek. "Why were you crying just now?"

Marguerite sighed. "Do you know I am utterly alone in the world? Even Aunt Isabel is n't my aunt; she was my mother's cousin. She loves me, I know, and I love her, but it is not like having an own mother like yours, and she and John are all I have on earth. I had a dear little blue-eyed aunty in Scotland once; I never saw her, but I have her

picture. She wore lace caps, and was very religious, Aunt Isabel says. She died and left me all her money, and a cat, but not a soul to love me, and even the cat is dead. I cried when it died. But that is n't the worst, I had gotten used to being all alone in the world, and did n't feel it so much in the convent, with those sweet sisters; but when I came out Aunt Isabel took me, and she has been awfully good to me, and there it is."

"But I can't see why her being good to you and loving you should be a trouble, nor why you could n't have loved your cousin, nor why he should n't have loved you. How could he help it, indeed?"

"Oh, he could help it fast enough. How would you like it, to be always thrown at a man's head, and have him dodging for fear you might hit him? She took me and followed him all around Europe, and then in New York, and here she is still following him. She loves money as she loves her own soul. Here is the way aunt loves: first her own self, then money (or *vice versa*), then me, and then John; so, if she could marry me to John, and my money to his, and then keep us always with her, she would have all she loves under her control."

"Oh, she can't be —"

"I suppose I am talking very badly — only — John, of course, is as good as gold, but I won't marry him, come what will. He is n't the only man in the world, — you may think he is, but he is n't." She lifted her head and shot a quick, mischievous glance into Portia's eyes. "He has plenty of money, so have I. Why can't we each marry some one who has n't any, and so even things up a little?"

"Marguerite, do you love some one else?" said Portia, earnestly.

"I don't know whether I do or not."

"Is it the artist?" Portia spoke with anxiety in her voice. "For if it is, he is not worthy of you, dear."

"Oh, yes, he is. Most any one is. John thinks I am a wicked flirt. Aunt Isabel says some one will be sure to marry me for my looks or my money, unless I take John, and that I am trifling away the best years of my life, and will be sure to marry a crooked stick at last, and no one can call Mr. Held crooked. Anyway, he may not care a straw for me, and if he does, he needs a good lesson. Now, in earnest, I will tell you just how I feel. I feel all the time as if I were dragging a ball and chain after me, like those poor men in striped clothes who passed here to-day. Aunt Isabel loves me, but she holds me, I can't tell you how. I love her, but I feel half afraid of her, — afraid she will make me do something sometime, whether I want to do it or not. If I should stop flirting and really love some one, and she should oppose me, I would have no soul in the world to whom I could turn. What would a girl like me do without one woman friend?" Portia tried to speak, but the impetuous words flowed on. "I say, if John only would love you and marry you, I would be free at last, and then I would have you. Oh, I would have you! You are beautiful, and you are good." She looked up in Portia's face, then threw her arms about her neck, and Portia felt the warm tears flowing. An impulse of tenderness swept over her like a flood.

"You have me now, darling, now and forever, no matter what your cousin does. You can be free, for all that, and have a woman friend who will love you for the beautiful soul that is in you. I know how it is. You laugh and tease and do all you can to make people think you are heartless, because you are too proud to lift the veil, and let them see into your heart. You want to be loved for what you are, and not for the outside show of things; but, Marguerite, you have not been told the truth. Would all your beauty have stolen into my heart in this way, without a beautiful soul to fill it? It is n't beauty without that. You are loved for what you are, not for either your money or your face."

"He does n't, and he makes love to me every time he gets the chance. He thinks he is in love."

"Who does ?"

"Mr. Held, and all he thinks of me is that I am a good subject for art. An old ruin would please him as well, but he makes love to me because he thinks I am pretty. He does n't see anything else. Half the men do not. That 's why he can't paint me," she spoke in short, sobbing sentences.

"Then why do you let him?"

"Just for fun. It pleases him, and keeps aunt's mind diverted from John, and that gives him a chance, and then it scares John, and that is worth doing, — he thinks he must watch over me like a brother, you know, — and then it will be good for the artist. He never will paint until he learns to look more than skin deep, so it is a good thing all around, — and then it makes Miss Keller just wild."

"But will no one be pained by it?"

Marguerite's conscience pricked her a little, but she only said, "Oh, Mr. Held may think he is for a little while, but he will soon get over it. A man who cares only for a pretty face can soon solace himself. There are more in the world."

"You puzzle me, Marguerite. Is n't there any one who is loving you, who might be hurt by it?"

"I puzzle myself. Let 's not talk about me any more. I am not a good subject. I love you and I mean to help John, and I will be free, and I guess that is all there is to say."

"Then dry your eyes, and lie down here where it is cool and quiet for a while. Here is your fan, and remember, darling, I am going to call you my own little sister, always. I have none, only you. Kiss me again, dear. Grandfather has gone to take Juliet and the other children to drive, and mamma is in the kitchen looking after some little things for me, so you will be alone for an hour yet."

"And Clare will never think of looking for me here, will she ?"

"I think not," said Portia, with a smile, "and remember, dear, I want my little sister to come and share my retreat with me whenever she likes."

CHAPTER XXIII

RESCUE AND SURRENDER

MARGUERITE'S restless spirit prompted her soon to be up and moving. She strung Portia's guitar, put it in tune, and strummed on it a little, then she tripped along the upper outside gallery to her own room, and quickly returned with a long brocaded ribbon of exquisite changeable tints, with which she decorated the instrument; then she leaned on the window-ledge with her chin in her hand, and looked out over the forest-covered hillside, where two great ledges of rock, jutting high in fantastic shapes, seemed making elaborate courtesies to each other.

"They look like an old man and an old woman hobnobbing together," she thought. She felt the breeze at the open window cooler now, and the desire seized her to climb the hillside and visit the old couple. Everything was very quiet in the house, her aunt taking her siesta, and Clare nowhere to be seen, and the other inmates gone about their own affairs. She stole out, taking only her parasol, down the outside stairway, around the rear of the house, through the garden, and off into the forest. The path led irregularly up the hill, but the old man and woman she had seen from Portia's window were farther away than she thought. The forest, dense with wild undergrowth, hid the rock ledges, and soon she lost sight of the house also, but the path

did not lead her to them, although it wound upward. It led her away toward the edge of the hill, where a deep cut had been made for the Gap road. She felt a thrill of romantic delight in being all alone in this wilderness, almost hoped that some strange adventure might befall, with a little quiver of fear lest it really should occur. In reality she was as safe here as a kitten in its nest, for any danger that might come to her from the mountain people. A lady would never be treated by them with anything other than their gentle, soft-voiced courtesy. Where the path joined the cut, high above it, the view opened out, a vista of billowy blue hills and mellow distances, and down below it was a rough slope of flat rock and a small stream of water. Here was a canvas-covered wagon, apparently filled with corn fodder. The little ox-team lay beside it, resting and sleepily chewing their cuds, while their driver sat among the fodder eating a coarse lunch of corn bread and raw salt pork. The edge of the cut, sharp and jagged, overhung the road and the stream, and the path wound close to it, completely screened by rank shrubbery.

As Marguerite tiptoed along in her white dress and rose-colored ribbons, like a butterfly that should have been hovering in the air instead of walking on the earth, she heard voices near her, and clinging to a scrubby little oak, leaned far enough over to see the group below. A man on a lean horse had just ridden up. She heard him say he was thirsty, and saw the man in the wagon fumble a moment in the fodder and bring forth a bottle, which he handed out, first glancing up and down the road.

"Hev ye mo' kaigs in thar?" asked the horseman, as he slowly drew out the cob cork. His horse improved the opportunity, amply justified by his leanness, to eat of the fodder in the wagon.

"I reckon," was the reply.

"Then I 'low ye 'd better move on right smart. They 's been a raid here lately. Be ye makin' fo' th' mill?"

"I reckon," was again the reply.

"Ye 'd better tu'n out o' ye'r way a leetle, 'nd go round by Sproat's. The mill business is broke up fer now, — th' ol' man 's been took; 'nd his woman, she keeps keer o' th' trade. Ye 'll hev tu stow thet thar in th' cave ovah th' mill bredge. Th' ol' woman, she axed me tu watch out fer ye, 'nd I 'lowed I 'd come up weth ye yere."

The man on the load hurriedly thrust his lunch into a sack, and began getting up his tired little oxen with loud shouts. Marguerite was on the point of turning homeward when she heard a name mentioned that caused her to pause and listen.

"Hit war th' agent yandah at th' station 'at put 'em on tu hit, I reckon," said the horseman. "My gal wuz rid'n' by th' station, 'nd she see Clark, thoo th' winder, talkin' weth thet young feller 't hes th' peach orchid, up Pine Knob way. She reckoned 'at he done hit, fer she hyearn him say 't he 'lowed 't th' co'n meal 't wuz tu'ned out o' th' mill wuz ruther juicy 'nd strong tastin', 'nd I reckon 't he done hit tu. Anyhow, we 'r' layin' out tu watch 'im, 'nd I 'low they 'll be a bullet thoo 'im 'fo' mawnin' or somethin' wuss."

Marguerite felt her heart suddenly stop beating. She grew faint with fear. They were going to put a bullet into Hanford Clark. It was Hanford! She crept cautiously as near the precipice's edge as she dared, and dropped on her knees to listen. Yes, surely it was Hanford. She heard the man say that Dick Dutton had brought the officials down on them and raided the mill, and broken up two stills, and then sold out his interest in the peach orchard and gone, — knowing it would be dangerous for him to stay, — and that they were going to be revenged on the agent.

"Hit war th' agent sot Dutton on, 'nd he 'll be met up weth 'fo' sun-up to-morrow fo' hit. We 'lowed fust 't we 'd drap 'im ovah th' trestle like we done th' lawyer las' spring; but Patterson, he 'lowed they wuz tu many stranger folks 'round thoo th' maount'ns fo' hit. He reckoned thar 'd be mo' s'arch fo' th' agent likely, 'nd they mount git track o' th' lawyer that-a-way, 'nd so git th' law on us, 'nd some o' we-uns mount be called tu swing fo' hit tu. These gov'nment ones is mighty dead sot oncet they gits on."

"Gee whoah thar, Bill, what ye duin' thar?" shouted the driver, getting his ox-team laboriously under way. He stopped in the middle of the stream while the beasts dipped their noses in the refreshing water, and sniffed over its rippling surface and called to the rider who was turning away.

"Look a-here, whar yu likely tu come up weth 'im? Yandah tu th' station?"

"They 's no chance th'ar. Naw, he 's off to-day. I be'n layin' fo' him evah sence th' raid, but he

sticks thar mighty clost." Then he went on to explain that he saw Clark was not at his post, and that he went to the boarding-house ostensibly to ask Mr. Ridgeway for the job of furnishing him post lumber, but in reality to find out Clark's movements; that he had seen him drive off and had learned from Andy that he was expected back about the time the chickens go to roost; that he had taken a turn about, which had brought him face to face with the agent, and that Clark had asked him where he might find the English gardener at the Gap, and that then he had posted three stout mountaineers at the turn just above the railway tunnel, and that he was now on his way to join them.

"Th' las' train comes thoo aftah dark, an' we 'low tu make th' capture, 'nd bind 'im, 'nd lay 'im on th' track inside th' tunn'l, an' then turn his hoss loose, 'nd lash 'im, 'nd let 'im jest natch'ly make fo' home like he 'd come up weth a skeer. Hit 's a natch'l death like fo' th' agent tu be met up weth by his own train."

"Why n't ye jest shoot 'im 'nd be done weth hit?" said the driver, bitterly. "Th' law hes no rights tu be interferin' weth we-uns 'nd ouh livin', 'nd we-all hes a right tu come up weth th' law."

"Thet 's so, but they is quite a few tu many fo' us hyarabouts, these days. Ef we kyant kiver ouh tracks, some o' we-uns mount be called on tu swing, oh w'ar a striped suit 'nd haul a chain."

He said this last in a lower tone, but every word fell heavily on Marguerite's heart. She remained motionless on her knees, almost paralyzed with horror and fear. She heard the driver shouting to

his clumsy beasts as they climbed a steep, narrow road, that led up into the mountain, and then down into a deep gorge behind the old mill. "Haw, Bill! Whoah thar! haw, Buck! Whoah thar! Gee! Gee up, Bill." His voice came back to her as if in a dream. Her head swam, and fiery motes danced before her eyes. Suddenly she sprang up. She must do something quickly! Should she run back, and send a messenger in haste? She looked at her pretty little watch. Oh, it was too late. By the time she reached the house he would be there, and she was halfway there already. She must go to him herself. She must run and stop him before he passed the turn above the tunnel. Without a moment's further thought she started down the steep bank. Her knees, weak with excitement, gave way under her, but she saved herself by catching at the bushes from going headlong. She stamped her foot. "See here!" she said, commanding herself; "I must be brave, I must be strong, or I can't reach him." Then gathering her pretty muslin skirts out of the wet, she sprang from one large stepping-stone to another across the stream, and hurried on in the direction taken by the horseman.

"I must go this way," she said. "This is the way he went. What if they should shoot me! But they would n't do that. They won't care for me, and I could go right by and they might never suspect me. If I could only get there first!" Suddenly the horrible thought came to her, what if this should not be the Gap road, what if the man had gone a roundabout way, and she should not reach

the tunnel at all! She stood still and wrung her hands. "Oh, what shall I do? what shall I do? If I were a man, I would have shot them both dead," she said.

She heard the sound of horses' feet coming at a walk, and presently a woman, young and pleasant-faced, with a baby in her arms, and a sack of meal behind her, rode around a curve in the road.

"Can you tell me, is this the Gap road?" said Marguerite, quickly.

The woman reined in her horse, and sat staring a moment as if she did not comprehend.

"Howdy!" she said.

"Howdy!" replied Marguerite. "Is this the way to the Gap?"

"Yu ain't 'lowin' tu walk cl'ar tu thar, be yu?" was the gentle reply.

"Oh, no, no! But is this the right way?"

"Why, yas 'm, this 'n' 's th' road."

"Thank you. And how far is it to the tunnel?"

"I don' rightly know. Hit mount be a mild or tharabouts. Hit 's nigh on tu a mild, I reckon," said the woman, languidly yet wonderingly.

"Thank you." Marguerite tried to appear to be sauntering, and swung her parasol carelessly, as the woman turned to gaze back at her, but when she was fairly around the curve out of sight, she began to run. On she hurried, now walking, now running, never stopping. Her heart beat high, her cheeks grew flushed, and the sun sank lower and lower. "Oh, if I could only run as fast as I could think!" she said. She wondered what Aunt Isabel might be thinking. She grew weak and tired, but still hurried

on. Would the turn never be reached? Suddenly she came to a full stop. She had reached a ford, wide and deep, and her heart sank. She could see no foot-bridge, not even a log on which to cross it. There was one higher up, where the stream was narrower, but she did not know of it. She thought she heard a whistle, and held her breath to listen, — some one might be coming who could take her across, — but no one came, and all was still.

Oh, it was so lonely! and the sun was sinking, sinking. The forest was all around her. A bird high over her head uttered a strange note that startled her. The tears filled her eyes, that ached with the pressure of them unshed, but she crowded them back. Suddenly a thought struck her. "Why have n't I prayed?" she said. "Portia Van Ostade would have prayed, and then this would n't have happened. Some one would have been here to help her over." She dropped on her knees, and her heart cried out within her. "Oh, please God, help me. Don't let them do it. Let me get across. Let me reach him first and send him back. O God, I love him, I love him. Let me go on, for Christ's sake, amen, amen."

Then she rose and walked to the edge of the water. How clear it was! She could see where the wagon tracks ran into it, on the gravelly bed, and the great boulders at one side. Some of them almost reached the surface. They were so near together she thought she could cross, stepping from one to another. Again she tucked up her skirts, and this time walked bravely into the water; but she was wrong, it would have been better had

she taken the way of the wagons, as the river bed was higher there, and among the boulders were deep holes, and in the middle of the stream the current was swift and strong; but how could she know the wisest way, poor little heart!

She shrank back as the cold water touched her skin, for she was heated, and the river was fed by mountain streams that drew their supply from cooler heights. "Oh, but I must, I must get across," she said, and slowly, steadily, stepped from stone to stone. The water came up higher and higher — alas for the pretty muslins and rose-colored ribbons! — now to her knees, now to her waist; then, slipping from her slimy footing, the water closed overhead, but only for an instant. She raised her face above the surface, and clambering upon another boulder, regained her footing. She steadied herself, leaning against the current, her heart beat wildly, and she still clung to her poor bedraggled parasol, as to a straw of hope. Again she essayed to step from stone to stone, carefully, carefully; once and again she succeeded, and again went down. Oh, would she never get across? Would she drown? Then the thought of her lover's peril gave her strength, and once more she struggled up on the rocks. She was nearly across, but, oh, how the time was passing! The sun was quite gone behind the hill. Even now they might be killing him, and the river was so cold and swift. Again she lifted up her heart in supplication and terror, not for herself. "O God, let me get across, let me go to him, let me save him!" and carefully reached one step farther, and gained it, but at the

next again went down. But here the river bed was steeply shelving to the opposite shore, although covered with jagged stones that hurt her. She toiled up it, and at last, with her clothes hanging heavily wet upon her, crawled on her hands and knees up the bank, where she lay for a moment exhausted with the struggle and the fright. Still she dared not stop. She rose and wrung out her draggled skirts, and plodded on, almost hopeless now of reaching the turn in time, and not knowing how much farther she must go.

"It can't be much farther, for the train goes through that tunnel soon after leaving the station," she thought.

Presently she heard the sound of crackling bushes and the snort of a horse. There at the roadside stood Prince, the lazy boarding-house hack, cropping the tender ends of shrubs, and dragging the light rig after him, very much cramped and tilted on its side. Evidently, in their struggle with their victim, the men had forgotten to lash the horse toward home as they intended. Marguerite paused, quivering like a deer set at bay by the hounds. In that one instant she became a woman. The nobility of her nature, which had lain dormant in the heart of the girl, rose within her. The heroine's, the woman's — nay, the Divine — spirit of willing self-sacrifice, if such need be, glowed, a living fire, in her great dark eyes. The reality of the horror she had feared was upon her, and she must meet it alone.

"They have taken him. Oh, they have done it!" she said with quivering lips. Springing to the horse's head, she backed him about until she

had righted the vehicle, then gathering the reins from under his feet, she climbed to the seat her lover had occupied so short a time since. If only he were not dead, she might save him yet, she thought. Cautiously, slowly, in the lessening light, she drove out of the road and straight in among the azalea and laurel shrubs, threading her way among the young oaks and slender pines, until the ground became too rough for her to go any farther. There, tying him securely behind a great thick-leaved rhododendron, that formed a complete screen from the road, she went on toward the cut, keeping well in among the bushes. Fearing that her white dress might betray her presence, she covered herself with the brown linen lap-cover from the wagon. Hearing voices, she crouched behind a rock, around which she could peer into the road through the leaves. The voices grew more distinct, and soon came the sound of running feet on the hard road, and the four men went hurrying by. She counted them as they passed, while her heart stood still.

"We best cl'ar out o' yer, 'nd show up at th' station 'fo' train time," she heard one of them say. Wet and shivering, she strained to catch the last sounds of their running feet, then heedless of thorns and brambles, she left her hiding-place, flying through the thicket and up the slope toward the cut of the tunnel. It was right before her now. She could see the dark walls of rock looming up in the twilight, with the patch of clear yellow sunset sky showing between them, and just beyond, the tunnel opening its black mouth, as if to swallow her

up forever. Here she paused and called his name with all her strength into the cavern, but only the hollow reverberations of her own voice came back to her. Then she entered, feeling her way cautiously in the darkness. The rock wall seemed icy cold to her touch, and great cold drops, trickling through the roof from underground springs, fell on her face and neck.

"Oh, they have killed him, they have killed him!" she wailed, and her voice sounded in her ears like a scream of agony. She paused again and listened, and this time she thought she heard a faint moan far beyond her in the gloom, and her eyes growing accustomed to the darkness, she hurried faster. Again the moan came to her. Yes, he was alive; he was there. She could see the dark form lying across the track in front of her.

"I am coming, Hanford; I am here," she cried, running and bending over him. "Speak to me." She touched him, feeling for his face. It was covered with cold drops, and — oh, horrible! — he was gagged — he could not speak to her — and bound with cruel ropes, round and round his body and arms and legs. The villains had done their work well. She began feeling for his pockets.

"I am looking for a knife, Hanford," she said, and found one. It was only a penknife, but she cut away tremblingly in her eagerness. What if the train should come now! But she would die with him if it did. She freed his hands, feeling for the cords that were cutting into the flesh at his wrists, and binding them behind his back. Then she tried to remove the torturing gag. He felt the touch of

her fingers on his face and neck, and it seemed to him that he was dreaming an angel had come to set him free.

"Oh, Hanford, I can't cut it. I shall hurt you," she cried, the tears streaming down her cheeks and dropping warm on his face. Then he knew her, and a thrill of joy, that in its intensity was pain, roused him. He felt with his freed hands for hers, and taking the knife from her rapidly cut the cords one by one. The stupor and numbness that had crept over him were gone in an instant, swept away by that sudden thrill of joy.

"Marguerite," he said, reaching for her in the darkness, "speak again. Is it you? Angel from heaven, is it you?"

"Hanford, don't wait; don't even speak. Come, come out of here. The train may be coming even now," she cried, pulling him toward the opening of the tunnel. All his strength returned to him then with the touch of her hands.

"Marguerite, how came you here? You are trembling and wet and cold. Let me carry you, Marguerite. There is no hurry. The train is not due yet. It is still light outside." He took her up in his arms and carried her, and she clung to him sobbing, her strength gone; and as he walked stumblingly out of that terrible hole in the earth, he continued to talk to her, out of the depths of his tenderness, scarcely knowing what words he used.

"Marguerite, my life, my soul, where did you come from? Marguerite, my hope, spirit of my spirit, did you know that I was dying there? How did you come to set me free? You are drenched

through, love, you are cold and shivering, but your tears warmed me, dear, they warmed me to the heart. If my love could only wrap you about and warm you so! Speak to me again, Marguerite or I shall think I am only dreaming this. Whisper it to me. Why did you come?"

She could not speak for sobbing, but he felt her heart beating, and her hands tighten their hold, and again the intensity of his love for her thrilled his whole being with pain, and he walked on in silence, scarcely feeling the earth beneath his feet. It was warmer in the outer air. He wrapped his coat about her, and picking up the linen lap-cover from where it had fallen as she ran, he began still further to wrap her in it, but she would not.

"Don't stop for this," she said, looking about her in terror. "I am warm now, almost;" but she shivered still. "We will run, that will warm me. Let us get away from here. Come. I will show you where I hid the horse."

"You hid him? You?" He stopped still in his astonishment; but she slipped her hand in his and pulled him on.

"Come, don't stand. Run. They may come back again and kill you. Did they hurt you, Hanford? I know they did."

"No, they were too many for me. They were upon me before I could collect my senses. I was driving along slowly, thinking — of — something not very pleasant. I was moody, and did n't care much what they did with me." They hurried on a few minutes in silence, then Marguerite spoke again, —

"Something not very pleasant? Then you must have been thinking of me. Would you care now what they might do with you, if they should come back?"

"Now, Marguerite, I would fight to the death," he said, between his closed teeth.

They found the horse as she had left him, and Hanford marvelled at her presence of mind and dexterity. As they jogged home in the darkness, he listened to her story, pathetic in the very simplicity of her telling, and the unwittingness with which she revealed her soul to him. Of her terror, — yet he knew it was for him; her moments of anguish, as she struggled in the swift, cold current — for him; her exhaustion and almost despair — for him; her courage reviving and strengthening — for him; and at last her tenderness and weeping — still for him; and he felt no more the sense of danger, nor of cords being cruelly wound about him, nor of the horror of being left in the darkness to wait for a terrible and indescribable death, but was filled with a sense of exhilaration, — as if he were a god who had received a sacrifice, or a soul who had passed through the "valley of the shadow of death" and entered into paradise. Very simply was the story told. Only, as they passed through the river at the ford, she drew back and shivered. At the same time they heard a low rumbling in the distance. It was the train that would have sent him into eternity. He gathered her close to him, and she covered her face with her hands and shrank down like a frightened child, as it rumbled through the tunnel with a hollow roar.

"Hanford, if I had n't heard those men, now, in this very minute you would have been being killed. You would never know — " She stopped and was silent.

"What would I never have known, Marguerite? Don't think of the rest."

"You would never have known that I cared, — nor that I was loving you," she faltered. "You would have gone out — and — I — I would have died."

"Marguerite, listen," he said, and then for a moment he could not speak. "There are no words," he said at last, "none deep enough, nor strong enough, nor beautiful enough, to utter what I would. Say again to me, 'I love you;' you never said it before, and to hear you now, takes me straight out of hell, where I was when I felt your tears on my face, into heaven."

"Yes, I said them once before, right here. I said them to God before I went into the water. I was afraid, and I prayed them here on the river-bank. Oh, I was so afraid I could n't get across, so I said, I love him, and God understood."

Hanford bowed his head. He thought of the one prayer of all prayers, made in the Garden of Gethsemane, and knew hers to be, in its human weakness and fear, a shadow of the same, — a giving up, if need be, her life for his, and once more he was dumb. At last he said, —

"You have sanctified my life, Marguerite. You have prayed the one prayer that makes a human soul divine. You would have given your life for mine, — for only the chance of saving mine."

"I prayed the most human kind of prayer, Hanford. It was to live, and get across before it should be too late."

"And all the time you knew you might die in the attempt."

"But I was not thinking about dying, only of living; and anyway, it is past now, and we are both safe, so we will not think of it any more, will we?"

"Forget it as soon as you can, darling. For me, the remembrance is sweet, and I shall treasure it forever."

Nearing home, they heard the sounds of banjoes, and negro voices singing, and of laughter. The guests were having their impromptu concert under the trees, where lanterns had been swung.

"Oh, what shall I do?" said Marguerite. "Don't let them know. Let me go in by the garden, by myself, — and — Hanford, what are you going to do? Will you have those men sent to prison? The man I heard talking said that, first, they were going to shoot you or throw you over the trestle, as they did the lawyer. They will kill you yet, Hanford, if they are free."

Hanford was tying the horse by the little garden gate, that he might walk with her to the house without being descried from the front.

"What's that?" he said sharply. "Over the trestle? So! That was the way he was disposed of! Tell me everything they said."

"Who was he?"

"The lawyer, Monk, who had charge of your aunt's affairs here in Patterson. He was suddenly missing last spring; that is the man. To-morrow, if

you are not made ill by all you have done, will you tell John every word of their talk? We may get a clue that will trace his murder to those very villains, and so bring them to justice, without —" he paused and bit his lip. "Come," he said, "we must go in; you are hardly able to stand. Let me carry you again; you are not heavy."

"Yes, I am; besides, I can walk. Bring them to justice without what, were you going to say?"

"Let me tell you to-morrow, sweetheart. It is only that you must not be dragged in, in any way."

The rear of the old house was entirely deserted. Marguerite led the way to the stairway leading to Portia's little parlor, then, standing on the step, she turned and took his face between her two hands.

"Hanford, now that I have done this, I can never say again what I said to you this afternoon when you left," and with a shiver and half a sob, she began to climb the stairs.

Poor heart! she had yielded. She could never again say "I am free" like the birds of the air. Her wings from this time forth were to take her at the will of another. Ah, when a woman gives her heart to her lover, she in a sense dies to herself, whether she realizes it or not. More often she does not; and for him, were such a thought presented to him, he would say, "It is not so," and yet so it is. In this instant Hanford realized the magnitude of his desires. He sprang after her, and gathering the drooping little figure in his arms carried her the remainder of the way, holding her close in the strength of his desperation.

"Dearest, does it hurt you so, that I love you as

I do? Yes, men are selfish, I see it; for if I could have my way, I would hold you forever, close, — I would have you mine; but see, it takes greater strength of love to open my arms this way and set you free, for if you were never to come back to them, Marguerite, I would rather you had left me as you found me, with the cords wound about me in the darkness; but go, you beautiful soul, be free. If you wish it, — must it be? — everything shall be as it was between us; only, for this evening, darling, I will keep the memory of it sacred, and believe that an angel came and cut the cords." He took both the cold little hands in his and kissed them. "Good-bye, free, beautiful little hands. I will send Miss Van Ostade to you. You will perish from this exposure. Good-bye."

He found Portia among the guests, talking with Miss Katherine. "Miss Van Ostade, I have brought you the celery," he said.

"Oh, Mr. Clark, you are safe back. I am glad. We who are responsible for the refreshments will be everlastingly grateful to you for this. I will go and take care of it."

"Indeed, yes. Yu ah ouh benefactor, Mr. Clark," said Katherine.

"I believe I am nervously glad to see you back," said Portia, as he walked on toward the house at her side. "I have had a troubled feeling, I can't imagine why, as of something dreadful impending." Hanford said nothing until they should be out of hearing of the others, and she talked on. "I hope I am not a creature of fancies. Mrs. Marshall has been fretting about her niece; she was nowhere to

be found at dinner. That may have added to the feeling somewhat."

Just then Clare came up to them.

"Has Miss McLourie returned?" said Portia.

"Non, mademoiselle," there was an anxious note in her voice. "Et madame, she look efery vair, in ze jardin, efery vair."

"Is your mistress out there now with the other guests?" asked Hanford.

"Oui, monsieur, et ze is distracted, la madame."

"I saw her in the house a moment since, so she cannot be lost, tell your mistress." He spoke guardedly, knowing well that Marguerite would prefer to tell her own story, and that she would tell it first of all to Portia.

"You were right, Miss Van Ostade, there has been trouble; but do not be alarmed, it is past. Miss McLourie will tell you, I am sure. She preferred to go to your room, and I told her I would send you to her. She has saved my life at the risk of her own." His lips quivered with emotion. "Go to her; she is drenched through, and fatigued to death. Say nothing to any one, — for — I think she wishes it. Is John here?"

"Yes, he is; go to the dining-room; I have dinner saved for you."

"Thank you, I will find John and then wait on myself. Don't trouble about me."

Portia found Marguerite suffering from a nervous chill, and without waiting for any explanations, helped her to her own room, warmed and comforted, before Clare had time to find Aunt Isabel, and bring her in from "ze jardin."

"Don't try to tell me to-night, little sister," said Portia, as Marguerite clung sobbing to her neck, weak from the relaxation of her nerves after their long tension, and more exhausted than she knew. "I will not tell any one a thing you do not wish, only that you were not well and have retired. I will bring you some hot milk, deary, and treat you like a half-drowned, half-starved little kitten," she said, kissing her and tucking her in.

Ah, yes! Portia, with the true instinct of a loving heart, knew what the little sister needed most. She took away the wet garments, lest Clare find them and make an outcry over them.

CHAPTER XXIV

AUNT ISABEL REMONSTRATES

THE two friends stood in Hanford Clark's old quarters at Scrapp's, looking out of the window, as they had done the last time they were in it together. "There," said Hanford, "you see those two dead trees, — the tall ones standing together? They must be upwards of a hundred feet high, and see how far they are below the trestle. They have grown out of a bed of almost solid rock, those pines. If a man fell from a moving train at that point, you can easily see he would fall into the next world. That's what became of Monk."

"We stood here and saw the vultures hovering over that spot," said John. "Could his remains be found and identified now? Hardly, I fear."

"Yes, I remember. It was to locate the spot that I brought you up here. Possibly by his clothing, or papers, whatever he had on at the time, he might be identified. Chaplain is an honorable fellow. He could not have known of this."

"I opine not."

"Well, what's to be done?"

"That's the question," said Hanford. "Party spirit ran high last spring, but that feeling has subsided now. This attack on me was evidently done in revenge, — Dutton being out of the way. I did

set them on the track, and I also advised Dutton to sell out and take himself off."

"Why did they pitch on you? Why did n't they take Craig?"

"Craig is a shrewd, cautious fellow. He kept himself well out of it."

"Have you seen the rascals who waylaid you since?"

"Not I. They dare not show up yet."

"Well, the question still remains, what 's to be done?"

"I can go back to New York, and take up my profession again."

"Stay here and fight it out. I will back you up."

"I can't. Miss McLourie is the only witness I would have in the case."

"I see. You are a noble fellow, and she — she is — a brick; she is a — "

"An angel," said Hanford. "She shall be spared all annoyance."

"Then the only thing to be done is to intimidate those fellows."

"We have no shadow of evidence against them."

"None as yet, but let some party come upon Monk's remains, there may be evidence found to do more than intimidate." They were silent a minute, then John continued. "We would better consult Judson. He knows these men, and he is law and gospel to them. You see he is the only male being they have any respect for, — a true Southern gentleman."

As they crossed over to the lawyer's old rooms, where Judson and John had their offices, they en-

countered Portia and Miss Katherine, with their carriage heaped full of green branches and vines, and flowers from Katherine's old garden.

"Ah, ha!" said Hanford, "you are going to make a bower of the ball-room."

"Oh, Mr. Clark," cried Miss Katherine, "you should heah the ladies back at the house praising you foh taking that trip yesterday, and bringing the celery. Youah ears would tingle."

After a word with Portia, John began speaking to Miss Katherine, and Hanford stepped into his place and addressed Portia quietly. "How is she?"

"She seems to have recovered entirely; is a trifle pale, but you will see her soon. She is to follow us in the carriage with her aunt," said Portia, in a low voice.

"We will be over to help you in an hour, or less," said John as they passed on.

"Thanks," said Portia; "we shall need your artistic judgment there."

"You will need workmen and tools to carry out your own ideas, more likely."

Judson Chaplain sat tilted back in his chair, smoking, — handsome and indolent. John clapped his hand on his shoulder, and gave him a shake. "Rouse up," he said; "Clark and I want you to bring all the powers of your mind to bear on what we have to say. Now, Hanford, begin."

"I think, suh," said Judson, after listening intently until Hanford was through, "you should leave this whole mattah to me. I know these fellows, have lived among them, so to speak, and I know right wheah tu put my hands on them, and they know it.

It's not worth ouh while tu prosecute, unless we get enough direct evidence tu convict, but I know the men who ah at the bottom of this."

"I think I know four of them now," said Hanford, grimly. "I do not care to prosecute, — not if public safety can be secured without it."

"One thing I wish tu say befo' we go any fa'ther, suh," said Chaplain, addressing Hanford, and regarding the two young men before him with a flash of fire in his eyes, "I wish tu say, as yu ah a gentleman, suh, yu recognize a gentleman when yu see him, — that my hands ah clean. I disclaim all knowledge of the dirty trick done heah, in the disposal of that rascally lawyer, suh, and — "

"It is not necessary," interrupted Hanford. "We have no suspicion of the sort, nor could we have. You are a gentleman, sir, through and through; and although you are of the South and I am of the North, we yet have a kinship in this," he held out his hand, and the other shook it warmly.

"Then we understand each other, suh. Now, will you give me the names of the ones who attacked yu last evening? I will ride up theih to-day, and let them know that they ah watched, and that they ah likely tue drag a ball and chain foh the rest of theih lives. They shall understand that the one who saved youh life saved theihs; and as foh the other matter, I will probe it tu the bitter end. They gave me my office by it, but I am pledged tu uphold the laws of the land, and moreovah my honoh is at stake."

"You are right, Judson," said John, gravely. "There is no other way."

"I admire your spirit," said Hanford, rising. "Now, sir, this is the first and last step I shall take in the affair. I am satisfied that you will do all that your judgment dictates as best; moreover, I bear these fellows no grave ill-will. They may, indeed, have rendered me a service, — certainly, if they secure to me your friendship, sir, if in no other way."

"You ah a generous man, suh. And let me assure you, you need have no cause for personal fear hereaftah. I can make this thing plain to them."

"I have none. Shall we go over to the hotel, John?" he had seen Marguerite and her aunt drive past. "Will you accompany us, sir? The ladies are decorating the room for this evening."

So the three friends sauntered up the winding paths to the building, which was fast nearing completion, and was quite imposing in appearance, as well as wholly artistic. John felt a sense of satisfaction and pride, as he called attention to its good points. "I feel like the wicked man in the Bible," he said, "as if I were saying, 'Is not this great Babylon, that I have builded?'"

"I believe I shah in that feeling also," said Judson.

"And you have a right to," said John.

"Your uncle must wish to see it," said Hanford.

"I have had it photographed at every stage, and sent the pictures on to him. He may come on this fall or winter. I have secured a manager to open it the day the last workman is out."

"Have you, indeed?" said Hanford. "You are

more of a business man than I gave you credit for."

"And why so low an opinion of my business ability?"

"Oh, you are an artist, you know."

John laughed. "The more genius, the more fool, eh?"

They found the ladies in the midst of the wildest confusion of materials, chatting, laughing, and making garlands. Portia stood in the centre, smiling and rosy, with her arms full of honeysuckle vines that trailed to the floor and filled the room with their fragrance.

"Here are more," she was saying. "Where shall I put them?"

"Yu can't du betteh than tu hold them just like that. We will put yu on a pedestal at the end of that arch, and call you Flora," said Miss Katherine.

"And keep me standing still all the evening while the rest of you dance! Indeed, no!"

John watched her with his heart in his eyes, as she dropped the vines at Miss Katherine's feet. "What can we do to help you?" he said. "Command us."

His mother saw the light in his face, from where she stood looking on, and her heart was filled with resentment towards the beautiful girl for whom it was kindled.

"Oh, we ah so glad yu ah come," said Miss Katherine. "Tell us, shall we put the musicians up theah on the gallery, or leave that foh those who ah not dancing, and screen off a place on the floor in one cornah foh them?"

"I will have one of the carpenters put up a framework under the end of that arch, where you proposed placing a pedestal for Miss Van Ostade, and the musicians can be screened off there."

"Now that I approve of," said Portia. "Miss Wells' suggestion was too cruel."

"Yu can't escape," said Miss Katherine, teasingly, as Portia sat herself down beside her. "You will be an ohnament all the same, whethah you dance o' pose in a cornah."

The words were spoken in her low sweet voice, that none but Portia should hear. Unconsciously to herself, she had opened the door of her warm Southern heart, and taken in this sister from a colder clime, and given her sweet welcome.

"You lovely ladies of the South have the most tempting way of giving a little flattery," said Portia, with a laugh. "One feels like believing all those nice little sugar-coated things, and swallowing them whole."

"I am not the only one who thinks so." Katherine glanced at John significantly. He was giving directions to a carpenter whom he had brought in. Mrs. Marshall crossed the room, and stood near him talking with Judson Chaplain.

"Oh, don't," said Portia, instinctively looking at her.

"Miss Van Ostade, come here and see how this will do," called John.

"You come too, Miss Wells, please," said Portia, rising.

Marguerite sat in a window near her aunt, unusually quiet for her, tying little pink and blue

pencils to the dainty programme cards which Mrs. Barry and Miss Katherine had gotten up the day before. Hanford stood beside her. It was the first opportunity he had had to speak with her, and his hand trembled a little as he took up one of the cards.

"May I mark on this?" he asked.

"Yes, but our supply is very limited. I warn you, if you spoil this, you can't have another for this evening."

Mr. Held entered as she spoke, and walked directly to her. "Ah, so this is what you are doing? Glad to see you recovered, Miss McLourie. Was it my thoughtlessness in keeping you sitting so long that caused the headache?" He knelt at her feet and began to tie in the pencils.

"Oh, not so! You don't do it right," she cried, taking the card from him.

"Teach me, then. You can teach me anything. What are you up to, Mr. Clark? Securing your dances beforehand? That is not fair."

Hanford laughed. "Fair or not, I am aware that you have been ahead of me," and seeing he could not talk with Marguerite then, he walked away.

As Katherine and Portia crossed the long room in answer to John's summons, Portia felt something under her foot, and stooping, picked up a handkerchief, — a dainty bit of linen, lace, and embroidery, which she had seen in Mrs. Marshall's hand a moment before.

"I believe this is yours," she said, handing it to her; but Mrs. Marshall seemed too engrossed in what she was saying to heed the gentle remark, so

Mr. Chaplain took it. As Portia turned toward John, she heard his mother say, —

"Thanks, you may toss it out of the window; it has been under her feet."

A shade of pallor passed over Portia's face. John flushed, and Judson Chaplain hesitated.

"Give it to me," said Marguerite. "It is too pretty to throw away," and she tucked it in her belt. Her aunt lifted her eyebrows and her shoulders simultaneously, and turning addressed John, —

"What are you contriving now," she asked carelessly, "that requires so much consulting over?"

John could not trust himself to speak, and turning strode angrily away.

"We must work at those garlands, oh, we never will get through," said Miss Katherine, with consummate tact, really carrying the impression that she had heard nothing. She circled her arm about Portia's waist, and drew her back to her seat among the vines.

"Shall you weah lilac this evening? It is your coloh in the daytime, but at night you should weah pink oh pale green."

"I suppose I ought, but it does n't matter. I may have to spend my time looking after the refreshments, you know. I have been saving Lucy steps all day, so I can bring her, and Maggie will come also, and I think — "

"Let's settle the question of the dress first. Yestahday, when you sent me to your wahdrobe for the apron, I saw just the thing I want to see you in. It is a pale green."

"Oh, that? I have had it two years. I call it my relique. It is a Paris gown, and was saved from the fire by being out of town at my aunt's. It is horribly out of style."

Katherine laughed. "Only two yeahs old, why, it is brand new. Yu should heah how old the dress is that I must weah."

"Ah, but you can't help appearing well dressed. You would be quaint and fascinating in anything. To prove it, there is Mr. Held looking at you this minute, — thinking of putting you in a picture."

Miss Katherine did not look at him. "He has a way of doing so, I imagine. Yu will weah the green, won't yu?"

"Yes, and it is very sweet of you to care what I wear. Perhaps I can modernize it a little."

"If yu ah not dead aftah all this, won't yu come ovah and sing tue ma, like you did last week? It brightens her life. She loves tu heah yu sing."

Dear Miss Katherine! Portia should not be allowed to think on the affront she had just received, and borne so bravely; and yet it was not wholly the sweet courtesy of the Southern woman that prompted her. Had Portia been able to look deep into the heart of her sister of the South, she would have found herself linked by a subtile chain of love to the gallant young soldier who had fought and died in the Confederate army, but who sat enthroned in his sister's heart. For Donald loved John and John loved Portia; so Miss Katherine covered the wound with a gentle touch, that helped to bring healing, and as Portia looked into her eyes, she thought, in spite of the stab she had just received from one of them,

"These Southern women are the truest and sweetest in the world," and perhaps she was right.

John had hardly left the room when Lord Chesterfield, the barber, appeared. He had come, he said, to inquire for the lady who was looking for experienced waiters for the evening, and to ask if his wife might be employed for the occasion. Chas was gotten up faultlessly, in the neatest of clothing and the whitest of linen, and being as white, if not whiter than old Clarissa herself, with his thick, silken black hair, his small black mustache, his large eyes and pallid face, he made a picture that was striking, almost handsome, as he stood with a deference that amounted to pomposity, talking to Portia.

Certainly, Miss Van Ostade would see his wife, — she was right here, would Miss Van Ostade "be so kind as please to excuse him?" He disappeared, and reappeared, bringing Mrs. Lord Chesterfield Marshall, née Louisa Ann Williams of Asheville, with skin as soft as satin and black as night, trim of figure, supple of waist, large of mouth, and hair of the tightest crimp. Surely Chas had done well. Louisa Ann was strong, capable, and thrifty, — a rare combination in one of the rising generation. But how was this? Was he not courting Miss Gabriella Gunn a short time since, with all the ardor of his passionate soul? Yes, and with such success that she had promised, by all the stars in heaven, to be true. The day and hour were set, the wedding feast prepared at his own cost, and the guests invited to partake of the same, when, lo! early in the morning, ere the dew was dry upon the leafy spray, looking from the window of his

parlor, he saw the jewel of his heart, leaning on the arm of his hated rival, enter the humble dwelling of the colored minister and carpenter. Sending a small boy to peep through the crack of the door, he learned that they were at that same instant becoming man and wife. Was his heart a crumbling heap of ruins? Not at all. Wise in his own generation, he had other strings to his bow. The question he had found in his cupidity hard to decide, had been decided for him. He would marry Louisa Ann Williams and her three hundred dollars.

He quietly boarded the train, sped to Asheville, was married, and returned to Patterson the same evening with his lithe and dusky bride upon his arm, — the "diamonds" sparkling in her ears and on her bosom, that he had bought her to show Miss Gunn what she had lost by her rash act, — in time to assist in disposing of the wedding feast, and in the enjoyment of the "possom" which Nancy Gunn knew so well how to prepare. Thus was Miss Gunn outwitted, and her practical joke outjoked, so to speak, for "the weasel was not caught asleep." But Gabriella, conscious of her own superior charms, sighed not for the "diamonds." She asserted that she had promised to be Mrs. Marshall, and she had kept her word, and Louisa Ann was quite satisfied with the distinction of owning the "diamonds" and the beau of the village.

Yes, Miss Van Ostade would accept of Louisa Ann's services, and she might begin at once, as there was much to do. Mrs. Marshall was moving languidly from window to window with her lorgnette, looking at the views, and listening to Judson

descant in praise of the location, the architect, the enterprise, the place, and all that filled his generous, sanguine heart. Mrs. Barry and Miss Keller had arrived with more programmes, Hanford was assisting Portia and Katherine with the garlands, and Mrs. Barry joined them.

"Let me help here," she said; "I have worked at those programmes till I am sick of them."

Marguerite still sat demurely tying in pencils, with Mr. Held at her feet, awkwardly assisting. Miss Keller attached herself to them.

"You see," she addressed herself to Mr. Held, "we had no cards, so Mrs. Barry made these out of her stiff water-color paper. Was n't she clever?"

"Water-color paper! Does she paint?"

"Oh, she told me not to mention it on my life. She was afraid you would ask to see her sketches."

"Does she sketch? better still. I will ask to see them."

At this point the barber reappeared, bringing his bride for Portia's inquisition. Marguerite looked up. She had not noticed him before. Her eyes danced with a mischievous light. Here was a chance to punish her aunt for her unkind thrust at Portia a moment since.

"Aunt Isabel, come here quick. Look! there is your nephew, old Pedro Manuelo's son. Why don't you go and greet him? How did he get away up here, I wonder!"

Mrs. Marshall's face lighted as Marguerite began her speech, and she put up her lorgnette and gazed down the length of the room half expectantly.

"Why, it's —" she made a quick step forward, then dropped her glasses in disgust.

"Why, it's — certainly, the distinguished Patterson barber," Marguerite mocked, in a low voice, and then laughed out a clear ringing laugh that echoed through the great vault of the room, in which they all joined. Even her aunt found it not to be resisted and laughed also.

"Marguerite, you are irrepressible, and your fun, my dear, is a little too broad."

"I know, aunt, but it was really dramatic. A start forward, an eager look, in another moment you would have clasped him in your arms. You can see," she said, turning to the rest, "how strong the resemblance must be to deceive Aunt Isabel so."

"You can see how prone youth is to make fun of the infirmities of age," said her aunt, tapping Marguerite's cheek playfully. One of her strongest passions was her love for this child, amounting almost to idolatry, superseding even her love for her son. With her indomitable will, she had determined John should marry her, if she had to kill all possible rivals, and drag them to the altar in chains.

"She helps my old eyes to deceive me, and then laughs at me. Likeness indeed! Your cousin is —"

"But he is n't my cousin, you know, aunt."

"My brother's son is tall, handsome, a veritable Apollo, — and to compare him with this nigger fop!" She put up her glasses and scrutinized him sharply. "He was a dandy from the time he was able to strut on two feet. It was your father,

Marguerite, who dubbed him Lord Chesterfield, and poor old Clarissa did not know any more than to have him baptized by the whole name."

"Watch him. Even the way he moves his hands is like. Why, aunt, the Patterson barber might pass for your brother's son's twin brother," and Marguerite heaved a profound sigh.

"Marguerite, what freak possesses you this morning?"

"It is nothing, aunt, only I was so reminded of poor Pedro. You see," she turned to the rest, "there is young Pedro and old Pedro; and young Pedro always makes love to me when we are in Cuba."

"I don't doubt it," said the artist.

"Love-making is his business, and he is very systematic about it. He has reduced it to a fine art. In his system, there are three stages. First he passes my window, spies me, starts back, lingers a moment, throws a kiss toward the lattice, presses his hand to his heart, and rides madly away. This is the beginning and the end, with a few more such scenes, and a rose or two thrown in, of the first stage."

"Who throws the roses?" asked Judson.

"Oh, any one, possibly Clare. She makes aunt any amount of trouble. Then at dusk he comes to my window and sings of his love and his despair. I drop him my handkerchief on which I have written, 'We are watched. O Pedro, beware!' That with one or two more evenings of music, tender and despairing, finishes the second stage. At last he calls on my aunt and asks for my hand,

— which she refuses — he becomes eloquent — she remains obdurate — I weep — he implores — she is firm — he becomes enraged and dashes from her presence swearing to end immediately his miserable existence — and — then we usually take our departure northward, and he begins business with renewed ardor in some other direction, and the next time we come down, he repeats the same routine with few variations. Indeed, they are not needed."

"I think I should wish for a little more variety," said Miss Keller.

"Oh, yes; you would, but then you are an American, you know. Poor Pedro, it is time he retired from business. Perhaps I would better marry him next time, aunt."

"You are chattering far too much. You would better go back. I am tired of waiting for you."

"Oh, yes. Poor aunt, I know you must be tired. There are only a few more to tie; I will leave those to you and Mr. Held, if you will be so kind, Miss Keller."

Mr. Held looked at his watch. "I think I must — "

"Oh, you surely are not going to desert me," said Miss Keller; so he remained, to the amusement of one, the delight of another, and the chagrin of himself.

Hanford accompanied them to the carriage, scarcely speaking. He handed them in, bowed, and turned toward the station. He had been unable to say a word more to Marguerite, but his eyes were eloquent, when for a single glance they met hers.

"What a silent fellow! An odd stick, I am afraid," said Mrs. Marshall. "I can't imagine what ever John sees to so admire in him. He did very well as a professional man in New York, but to come down to being a station agent in a miserable little hole like this—"

"He lost his health there, you know, Aunt Isabel."

"I heard him say he was perfectly recovered the other day. Why doesn't he go back, and take up his work again instead of being an employee down here? These college wonders are sure to drop out of sight sooner or later."

"I would gladly tell you, aunt, but you see I am not supposed to be his confidante."

"So you haven't renewed the flirtation you began on the steamer, then? Wonders will never cease."

"Aunt! With a station agent! Do you think all your education has quite gone for nothing? Now you suggest it, I think I will; it will relieve the tedium here." Marguerite leaned back in the carriage and closed her eyes. Her aunt thought she looked pale.

"Where were you yesterday when we could not find you, Marguerite?"

"I went to walk."

"Alone?"

"Yes, why not?"

"Oh, my child, whatever will become of you when I am taken away from you?"

"You mustn't be taken away from me, aunt. You are far too good to me. I do not deserve it."

Her aunt sighed. "If you would only yield to my wishes, I would have nothing more to trouble me."

Marguerite was silent. "Where were you when you were not walking? You could n't have walked all the time."

"I was in Miss Van Ostade's little parlor."

"In her room? One would think you had chosen this young boarding-house keeper for your most intimate friend."

"I thought, aunt, that I would take up the working classes for my fad, you know; and as she is the most agreeable of them I have ever met, I have chosen her for my bosom friend."

"Tush! You know very well she does not belong to that class. It is a wretched excuse."

"Oh, does n't she? I supposed she did from the way you speak of her. Then she must belong to the aristocracy."

"She is a Northern hussy, who has come down here to make money out of the poor bleeding South, — that 's what she is."

"Do we represent the poor bleeding South? You said she was making money out of us, but we seem to be quite comfortable."

"Marguerite, you are very young. You should listen to the opinions of those who are really your friends, who love you. Sometime I shall be gone, and then what will become of you? What will be the end of all this vacillation? You will be surrounded by a horde of vampires, who will feed upon you until there is nothing left. It is right that you should listen to me. Why do you treat John so cruelly? He would protect you, love you devotedly, if you would only let him."

Marguerite laughed. "Why, aunt, you would n't

have me go down on my knees and ask him to marry me, would you? If he does n't wish to be my protector and all that, am I to blame?"

"But you avoid him. You never allow him an opportunity to be even alone with you."

"Did n't I spend a whole hour alone with him this very morning, in the most earnest kind of conversation?"

"Yes, poor fellow, with his great warm heart! He came right to me, and spent his breath in praising you. He seemed to have found new reasons for admiring you."

Marguerite was touched. She leaned over and patted her aunt's hand. "You have always been good to me, aunty dear, and so has John, even if we did fight, he and I."

"Cannot you get over that childish quarrel?"

"Oh, yes. We got over it long ago."

"I was so happy, so encouraged, this morning, and there that girl had to step in between you again; I could have struck her down."

"Now, Aunt Isabel," said Marguerite, flashing quickly, "let's speak the truth for once and talk sense. Miss Van Ostade is beautiful. We know it, and what is the use in denying it? Every one in the house admires her, and she is good. Now! Aunty, I will make you a promise. I will be as good to John as I know how, for a week. I will ride and walk with him, drive with him, talk with him, go over his old hotel with him, and be nice to him generally for a whole week, and if at the end of that time he has n't seen fit to propose over again, why, then, I will do as I please."

"And what will you please to do?"

"Oh," she covered a yawn with her fingers, "I'll do something. I'll be an American girl out and out. I'll do what I please, without reference to anybody on earth, as Miss Keller does. I'll marry the station agent, I believe, — and live happily ever after."

"Marguerite! I thought you were going to be serious."

"I am, aunt, very serious." They were driving into the yard now, and Marguerite leaned forward and looked into Mrs. Marshall's eyes with a laughing light in her own. "I will tell every one here that that nigger fop is the exact counterpart of some of your Spanish relatives if you are nasty to Miss Van Ostade again," she said.

Her aunt laughed. "To think, my dear, that you should be so guileless. Can't you see that she is like all the rest of her class, ready to toady to wealth? I have no patience with you."

CHAPTER XXV

PORTIA SINGS THE OLD SONGS

AFTER Mrs. Marshall's departure, Portia, glad to be relieved of the oppressive presence, flew about, directing Louisa Ann, and rapidly bringing order out of chaos. John returned, bringing the framework on which draperies and garlands were to be hung.

"Here is the screen for the musicians," he said.

"What are we to do for lights?" asked Mrs. Barry.

"We have a gas-tank, — it should be tested, though," said Judson. "It might not be fully in order. What do you say, John?"

"Test it by all means, if the fixtures are done."

"And if it should not work?" said Mrs. Barry.

"We might bring over lamps from the house," said Portia.

"We shall task you for nothing more," said John. "Hanford can loan us some head-lights."

"Miss McLourie promised to send the carriage back," said Portia. "I wonder what time it is! Think of my running away, with forty boarders. I must go home."

Katherine laughed. "Youh speaking of youh forty boarders makes me think of the 'Forty thieves.' Now tell me, did you run away with

them, or have they run away with you?" But Portia was already at the farther end of the room.

"Oh, we run away with her," said Mrs. Barry. "We are never satisfied unless she is with us. She must plan for us, sing to us, get up costumes for our charades, talk to us, — do you know how well she converses? She has no invalids now to look after, luckily, except her mother, and she is the sweetest woman on earth."

"Mamma is no invalid now," said Portia, returning. "She is much stronger. She takes all the responsibility of the lunches for me. That is how I can run away like this."

"The carriage is here," said John, and they all went out, leaving the great room in charge of the capable Louisa Ann.

"Oh, I must say a word more to the bride," said Portia, running back. "Don't wait; I will be right out."

When she returned she found John waiting alone, standing beside a beautiful little trap, and Brown Betty in the harness.

"See what I have done," he cried gleefully. "I have sent them all on, Miss Katherine and all. I brought her over in this, and now I am going to take you back in it, and have you one whole delicious hour all to myself. It is only half after eleven."

"John, you have outwitted me," she said in dismay, looking after the carriage as it disappeared around the corner of the notion store.

"Yes, and now I have you in a trap," he said, lifting her in. She laughed merrily at the foolish pun, as he settled himself beside her.

"What a beautiful little rig! and, John, what a man you are!"

"The first time we ever drove together, we had the Gebbs' buggy and the little gray pony, and it was Mr. Russell who was outwitted. Dick Dutton told me they drove on for a joke, because he was contriving to be left behind for the sake of being left alone to drive with you." Portia gave a radiant glance into his face, but said nothing. "Poor fellow! He wanted the seat beside you. I wanted it too, and it fell to me," he added gently, "and it is mine forever." He looked into her eyes, and the light in hers was his only answer. "Do you notice what I am doing, having your little horse trained to drive? Come, Brownie, pick up your feet. She is lazy, it is so warm. I shall get the nobbiest little turnout in New York for you, and —"

"You are far too good to me, John. You must n't do these things."

"Must n't I? And why not?"

"Can't you see how it is hurting your mother, that you — that we are loving each other? I felt abashed, humiliated in the dust."

His eyes flashed with the fire of anger. "Even my mother is not precious to me when she strikes at you. She knew she had me in her power, that before all those others I could say nothing." He bit his lip to keep back the torrent of words too bitter for him to utter.

"I did n't feel bitter, John, because you, with your great loving heart, bore the blow for me. I forgot it was me she struck as I saw you walk away. I am going to talk a little plain common-sense, to

make a speech, and you (to pay for running away with me) must listen in patience. We may not have the chance to have a good, quiet, serious talk again for days, you know."

They had turned into a road leading through pine forest, where the shadows were heavy and cool, and the air full of resinous fragrance. John drew the little horse down to a walk, and her hoofs fell on the carpeted path as if she trod on velvet. He placed his hand on Portia's with a touch that thrilled through her nerves like wine. "I will listen to you," he said, with a happy laugh, "as long as you keep to the common-sense, but if you utter a word of sophistry, I will not listen to you, no, not even if you sing it."

She would have withdrawn her hand, but, with an impulse that carried her beyond her reserve she lifted his to her lips and kissed it. "It is hard to say the plain reasonable things to you I ought. Your loving intoxicates me. You have entered into my heart, — into my very soul." She paused, and he bent forward and looked into her eyes. They swam in tears.

"So deep and true," he said, "will they always shine for me like this?"

She turned her face away. "John, don't make it so hard for me to say what I ought. I want first to make you understand how I love you, — but if I do that, I can never go any further."

"That is far enough. Come, I will listen to that forever, and there shall be no end."

"Love, that is born of the highest, should cast no shadow on any human soul," she paused, and he

was silent. "Ours," she continued, "brings unhappiness to the one of all others whom you should not hurt. Because she is your mother, she shall be dear to me. Ought we not to put aside our own wishes? What shall we do?" Still he was silent. "Is it right that in our loving we should hurt another? Think what it must be to her. She is being crossed in everything. Oh, John, if I, who have known you so short a time, love you as I do, what must you be to her? I felt this morning as if I must kneel to her and beg for forgiveness, or else to be taken into her heart with you. Why could n't you have done as she wished so long ago, before ever you knew me? If you had loved that beautiful girl, — how could you help doing so, — then your mother would have been happy; but now she hates me because I have come between her and her dearest wishes, and all her lifelong prejudices weigh against me. There is a wrong somewhere."

"Portia —"

"Ought we not to, at least, cover up this love, set it aside, perhaps for years, if need be?"

"No, no, no! I say no! Portia."

"But can we, even for the greatest good that could come to us, can we ride over your mother's heart?"

"I tell you, Portia, this is sophistry. Love and respect I owe my mother, and honor; but when a man has reached my age, even his mother has no right to rule over his spirit. Some things are sacred even from her interference, and only to his God is he answerable. No power on earth shall

take you from me, Portia. — Dearest, dearest, take your hands from your face, and say the words with me. Say them. No power on earth shall take you from me."

"Oh, John, if I could feel in my heart that it is right."

"Then feel it in my heart, Portia, for I know. As I hold you now, so shall it be forever. My heart shall be the nearest to your own. If I could, I would hold you with an irresistible power, — but I cannot. It is you who hold me so, although you do not know it. Now will you say the words with me? No power on earth — "

"When I have earned the right, John. I will set myself with all my heart to win your mother to love me, if only a little, and then, I promise you, I will put away all personal pride, I will accept from you all, all! when I am able only to give my poor self to you."

"Your bountiful, beautiful self. I would give up all I have on earth rather than lose you."

"Wait, John," she placed her hand over his lips, "don't say those things — I have asked you so many times — until I have earned them — until I am really yours."

"We never earn anything in this world, Portia. I have never earned your love, but I have it."

They were both silent for a time. At last John broke the spell. "And when is all this to be finished? It cannot go on forever, — when will you say of yourself, I am really his?"

She drew herself up, and looked in his face with the clear, steady light in hers that seemed to him

always like inspiration. "You recall me to earth again," she said, taking his hand with gentle firmness. "There! now drive with both hands." He obeyed. "I have a bright idea," she said after another moment's silence. "To be sure of the right from some other source than your — Love is blind, you know, and you may be blinded — I know you are, from some things you have said in the last few minutes. No. I say you must drive with both hands."

"And I say, I need but one. Go on with your bright idea."

"Please, John, I will not let you blind me also. There, hold the lines, so, — and here is the whip, hold it too. Now listen. I am going to sing for your beautiful old friend to-morrow. I feel that those whose eyes are closed to the world around them have clearer spiritual insight than we have, and that is what we need now, you and I. I could talk with grandfather, or my own sweet mother, but they are both too nearly interested through their love for me, and the pride I told you of. Mrs. Wells will be able to be just, and if anything will be influenced the other way, through the old-time prejudices, you know, — but I think she is so near heaven that even these may have slipped from her."

"What if she decides against me?"

"We will wait."

"But if she says forever? That would be an earthly power coming between us. No, I cannot consent to that."

"Are you sure it would be of this world?"

"You may do it, if you will sing to her first."

"I may not be able to sing for her afterwards."

"Very well, then I am safe. Only then she may say I am not good enough for an angel."

"John! don't be absurd."

"If she decides for me, then what will you do? Will you consider it then as a voice from heaven?"

She did not reply immediately, and he felt her agitation. "See," he said, "how nicely I can manage the little horse with one hand. Now what will you do?"

"What if — I should not be able to put this matter to her in such a way as not to influence her?" she said in an anxious voice.

"Portia," he said softly, "you are hardly of the earth yourself, my beautiful. I only fear your abnormal conscience will not let you be fair to my cause. Let me put it to her."

"You know you could not do it, John." She freed herself from his touch as before. "You must not hold me like this, no. But I promise you, if I can lay our case before her in a plain enough way, bare of all my heart might plead for you or for me, that I will take her answer as a voice from heaven. What are you doing, John?"

"Turning around."

"I know, but aren't you going to take me home?"

"Not now. I am going to take you to her."

"But they will be at lunch."

"That is nothing. What is eating? I heard you say at the hotel, you were not needed at home at this hour, — go with me. I can make it all right

with Katherine, and her mother will think nothing of it. How can I eat or sleep or rest, if you are going to abide by this, until I know? No, I am only arranging the cover; see, I am obedient. But if I may not touch you, nor even speak what my heart prompts to you, I will look at you and think what thoughts I please."

So once more her lover had his way, and led her up to the blind woman's door just as they were about to sit down to the lunch table. "Will you let two starving fellow-mortals eat with you?" he called cheerily. "I brought Miss Van Ostade here against her will, or rather, at my own will, to — to — sing for your mother."

Miss Katherine was delighted. "It is really like the old days ah here again, John," she said; "when people just happened in at any time, and we always had company at meals. Ma, here is Miss Van Ostade. John brought her to sing for you after lunch."

"A case of little Tommy Tucker, — only I get my supper first and sing afterwards," said Portia.

"And you are just in time, my dear," said the blind woman, warmly. There was a little tremor in Portia's hands when she clasped them in both her own, and when she took John's arm as he led her out to the table (she always looked for him to lead her out to meals when he was with them), she noticed the same tremor there.

"Why does your arm tremble?" she said, so quietly that only he heard her.

"Does it? I am a little tired, perhaps. I have been driving, you know."

"Does driving make you tired, a great strong fellow like you?" She placed her other hand on his, and knew in an instant that the tremor came from his heart, and that she was treading on forbidden ground. She turned her sightless eyes toward him as though she could read the lines of his face, and was silent; but for him, he was even more tender of her than usual, as he gently placed her in her chair, and lifted her in it with his strong arms to the table.

After lunch Portia sang, while the old lady, leaning back in her chair, closed her eyes and listened. She sang all the songs she could remember, both grave and gay, and John, seated in the doorway, with his hands clasped about his knees, listened also. Miss Katherine was busied with her household cares. "Ma" was happy, and she was content.

"I have sung all the songs I know without my music," said Portia at last.

"Ah, don't stop yet. Sing them over again," said the blind woman.

"I will sing some of these," said Portia, selecting from the music lying on the piano some of the songs that had stirred the hearts of the boys in gray to deeds of heroic courage and even of desperation. She began one.

"Don't sing that," said John, entering and laying hold of the music.

"Yes, let her. It is good of you, Miss Van Ostade. I long to hear the old songs once more."

"And I am not singing for you, Mr. Marshall. You brought me here to sing for her."

"Yes, sir, and if you do not like them, you can go back North again," said his old friend, with a laugh.

He gave one imploring look, but still Portia sang the old songs, and he strolled out and sat on the garden seat where he had sat with Miss Katherine, on that day when the voice he heard now had begun to sing a new song in his heart. "Yes," he said to himself, "I loved her before I saw her, when I sat in the dark, and she sang to me."

When Portia finished, she turned and saw the blind woman leaning back in her chair with closed eyelids, but two tears had escaped, and trembled, one on either cheek. Then Portia went quickly and knelt at her feet, and taking one of the dear old hands, so soft and white, in hers, she kissed it. "Forgive me," she said, "for bringing the past before you and making you sad."

"The sadness is only the remembrance of sorrow that is gone, dear, and the dawn and the opening of the eyes is before me," she placed her hand on Portia's head. "Bless you, daughter of the North, and thank you. I love sweet music; and a sweet voice; but in singing the old songs of the boys in gray, you have sung your way deeper into my heart. What have I to forgive?"

Then Portia bowed her head under the gentle touch, and opened her heart to its very depths, to the clear seeing of the blind woman's spirit, and there was silence for a few moments, until Portia spoke again imploringly, —

"Tell me what is right. You are wise and true. You see into heaven, as you sit here with your eyes

closed to all earthly sights. I have promised John I will abide by what you say. Can love be right when it hurts another? Can we call it God-given when his mother is cut to the heart by it? Answer these questions for me, — I am afraid of them."

"This is a grave question to lay upon me, daughter." She drew Portia closer to her side, and placing one hand on her face, touched her lightly, tracing the contour of her features. "Let me know you this way. I think — " she went on slowly, as Portia turned her face toward her, giving herself into her hands, "I think it is a beautiful face, and I should judge to find here a beautiful soul, as the voice that interprets it to me is beautiful. Why should he not love you?"

"Because his mother hates me. She has the old-time prejudices, and — she had hoped for another choice for him. She is frail, she loves him so, — and she is his mother. I have a sense of guilt when I think of the pain we are inflicting. And yet — this — that has come to me — " she covered her face with her hands, "I have let you see into my heart, — how can I put it from me? But if it is right, I must. What is right, should be to us as necessity. If she never can be won to love me — you had — you must have had the same prejudices, the hatred of us of the North that she has, you too lost your dearest, more even than she. I sang those songs because I wished — you are so far above most of us — I wished to awaken the old spirit in you if it might be sleeping, and then ask you to judge, with that in your heart, as if John were your

own. Could you love me then, and take me as John's wife? Could you be content, and say, 'it is right'?"

"That way of judging might satisfy your conscience, but the emotional way would not be the right way. You wish to put it to the severest test, but let us be reasonable. You are of good family, are you not?"

"Yes," said Portia, lifting her head quickly, "and without stain. My father was of Dutch ancestry, from one of the best families in New York. My mother is descended from a noble Puritan family, of pure English strain; they were ladies and gentlemen, statesmen and scholars, of noble birth. I am proud of my heredity, if I do —"

"It is not what you do; it is what you are. We have learned that lesson here in the South. I see no reason why she should be bitter toward you. The wrong is on her side. John has the right to choose. A man cannot be always subservient to his parents, — he could not be and be a man. His mother should respect his manhood."

Portia rose and stood at the window. She saw John pacing the garden-paths, and turning impetuously she knelt again at the blind woman's feet. "Put your hands on my head once more, and bless me," she said. "I must go to him and tell him quickly; you are right, if I love him, I must put him first. First of all, he must stand in my heart," and once again the old hands were laid on her head in blessing.

Then Portia rose, and bending over the old lady's chair kissed her, and hurried away. She sought

for Katherine at the far end of the house, where the stores were kept.

"I am going," she called, with a ring of joy in her voice; "don't come, I will see you this evening. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," called Katherine; "weah the pretty green, remembah."

"Surely I will," said Portia, and was gone.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE OLD DAYS REVIVED

YES, truly, past days were being revived with a spirit which seemed to combine the rich, rare flavor of the old with the sparkle and energy of the new. Miss Katherine felt the thrill of pleasure that had tingled through her nerves in other days as she heard the first long-drawn chords and high thread-like tones of the viols and violins. The musicians behind the flowery screen were getting their instruments in tune, and the sounds of scraping and thrumming caused a delicious sense of anticipation to pervade the place, and formed a vague background of tones for the flutter and buzz and hum of fans and soft voices and laughter and ceaseless moving of many feet.

Portia stood near Katherine and Mrs. Judson Chaplain, who were making the introductions between the old element and the new. John was busy here, there, and everywhere. Elated with a transforming happiness, he heard the congratulations of his friends and their praises of his work, the good he was accomplishing, and the new life he had brought to the place, as if the words were uttered in his dreams. Sometimes his eyes wandered toward the group near the door and rested on Portia's face. Was she ever so beautiful before? Possibly not. Since her talk with the blind woman she had re-

signed herself to the love which had set lights in her eyes, and kindled the fire within her which was to illumine her spirit as the sun illumines the day that follows such a dawn. Sometimes his eyes rested for a moment on his mother as she stood with Marguerite at her side, frailer, more spirit-like than ever. Her eyes glowed as she listened to the praises of her son, like living coals from among the ashen hues of her whitening hair, and her filmy, wreathing laces of white and black. Her draperies swept the floor with a silken swish, and her fine slender hands held a heavy feather fan, that seemed, as it moved, to shed an odor of sandal-wood and musk about her.

Portia looked around her with amazement. Where had they all come from, — these guests with soft voices and graceful ways, clad in quaint, old lustrous garments with odd garniture of laces, or in simple, dainty muslins?

Though all were in excellent taste, she noticed that the newest costumes were of cheap materials, while those of rich and elegant fabric were of antique shape and odd device. It was like the awakening of the sleeping beauty in the wood, — where all the lords and ladies who had slept with her awakened with her and went about in their rare old costumes, unconscious of the changes wrought by the years, and mingling with the courtiers and retainers of the prince in their modern dress, blending thus the old and the new. Where had they come from, all these spirits of the old life? Had some magician waved his wand and called them out of the past? Yes, a wave of sympathetic feel-

ing from the North had swept in among them, and Hope had come with beckoning finger, saying, "Wake all ye that sleep, for the dawn of a new era is at hand," and the new South had arisen to meet it, — these spirits had obeyed the call. They had gone to their chests and presses and taken out their beautiful garments, so long unused, and many a quaint article of jewelry, and arrayed in these, they had gone forth to meet the "Spirit of the age."

Portia, gazing on the scene, felt this. Many of the faces around her seemed beautiful with a chastened kind of beauty, — the fineness of gold that has been tried by fire, — and the lines of a past sorrow still remained, illuminated by the pleasure of the moment, into a subtle, pathetic kind of loveliness like that in the face of Miss Katherine as she stood before her.

Katherine was clad in a pale yellow satin brocaded with a faint pattern of hyacinths in pinks, lavenders, and slender leaves of soft greens. It was covered over the bodice with rare old lace, and frills of the same fell over her hands. Originally it had been made with wide skirt, to fall over spreading hoops; but now the ample folds, falling in straight lines to the floor, and only slightly looped to give the prevailing panier effect of the day, made the garment far more artistic than in its original style.

"Is n't it charming?" said Marguerite to her aunt. Mrs. Marshall was at that moment gazing intently and scrutinizingly at Chas, who was moving up and down the great hall without, in all the grandeur of his faultless attire, performing

duties as usher. "I don't mean the barber, aunt," she said, with dancing eyes. "Look this way. I mean Miss Katherine's dress."

"Ah, yes. We do not have such goods nowadays." She lifted her lorgnette and carefully looked at the gown in question. "And if I remember rightly her mother wore that gown to your mother's wedding."

"Oh, Aunt Isabel! How can you remember the particular stuff of which a particular gown was made all these years on years?" said Marguerite, in an awed voice. "That is like a fairy tale."

"Why, child, you are not so very old; and it was only a year after that I held you in my arms, and John stood at my knee, a little fellow in long curls, and kissed your baby fingers. I made up my mind then that you should one day be my daughter. Now, for this evening, remember your promise, Marguerite. There he is now, looking at you."

Marguerite was touched. "Oh, aunty, aunty, why did you? Yes, I will remember;" but in her heart she said, "Oh, if my mother had only lived, if she had only lived!"

John was looking at her, and now he came to her side. "My little cousin looks prettier than ever to-night," he said, glancing her over admiringly. There was a tender note in his voice which pleased her, coming from him, giving her no alarm. "Give me your programme. Are there any dances left for me? Ah, I am just in time. They are nearly all taken."

"Yes, I have been reckless. I have given any-

body as many dances as were asked for. Put your name down for all that are left. I am tired and can more easily refuse you, you know."

"You look pale. I 'm thinking you ought not to dance much, brave little sister."

"Did she tell you to call me that?"

"Who?"

"You know. She is always to call me sister. She said so. Come over here and sit down a minute. I want to tell you something. I have promised your mother I will be just as nice to you as possible for a — whole week, and I want you to help me."

"With all my heart — little sister. Hello, here comes some one who would like to be in my shoes for this week, I guess." She looked up and saw Hanford making his entering bows at the door.

"I don't think he would," she said, looking away with a little laugh.

"Why so?"

"Oh, because."

"An excellent reason, like most of your reasons."

"Well, if you must know, I think he would rather be in his own."

They both laughed, and Aunt Isabel was pleased as she glanced across at them, while she conversed with sundry courtly elderly gentlemen who had gathered about her.

"Look at your mother. She is the belle of the evening. I 'll wager Captain Milvey is asking her to dance with him. Yes, sir, he has her card. There is the music! Where is Mr. Held, I wonder."

"He is coming yonder. Marguerite, did — did she say anything else when she told you she should call you little sister? What did she say to you? What have you told her?"

"Oh, John, John! Poor Aunt Isabel! There is no use in my being nice to you even for a week. How many dances am I to have with you? Give me back my card; you have nearly broken it. What! not any? There, take it back and put your name down in every vacant place. I want it to show to aunt when I get home. Quick! here is Mr. Held."

"You know very well I wanted those dances. I had n't had time to look over my own card."

"Never mind; put your name down to all that are left, and I will let you off the ones you are to dance with her. Underline hers and I will remember."

"Then what will you do?"

"Me? Oh, I will bestow them on some one who would not like to be in your shoes."

"Be careful what you do, little sister; some hearts can be broken."

"Not men's hearts, John. Yes, yes. I will be careful if you will not look at me so. You are a good brother. Here, wear this for me." She slipped a beautiful Jacqueminot bud from the cluster in her hand. "There," she said, placing it in his coat, "in that is my promise to be good for a week, perhaps longer."

"And I shall hold you to it, little lady."

"Have n't you one for me also?" said Mr. Held as he walked away with her. They were to lead the grand march together.

"Why, yes, but — why didn't you keep one for yourself? Why were you so generous as to give them all to me?"

"Can't you guess why? One bud from your hand — thanks. Now it has a value no other flower could have."

"My cousin did not have to ask for his."

"Very true; but its real value is that put upon it by the possessor. It is I who prize it the most." But he was wrong, for, months after, John found his bud fragrant still, clinging to his evening coat, shrivelled and dried, and he placed it among his treasures with a tender thought of the little hand that had bestowed it, while Mr. Held's had long since been thrown from his window and trampled under foot.

"Let me see," he said, looking at his card. "I am to have this first one, and then no more until the last. What am I to do in the mean time? That is an adorable one, — the last; but have you no more for me?"

"No, my card is full. I think we must start."

So the ball was fairly opened, and the merriment begun. Mrs. Marshall remained long enough to become weary. She danced the minuet in honor of John's success, with the captain, who vowed she had lost none of her youthful graces; she had watched John and Marguerite circling together over the polished floor; she had been served with refreshments by two colonels, the courteous old captain and a doctor, all gallant with the stateliness of other days; and she had been carefully placed in her carriage by her son, with the compliment that

she was really the queen of the evening if she was his mother, — ere John had had his first dance with Portia.

"I thought my one delight of the evening was never to come to me," he said, — "our first dance together. Think what it means to me."

Portia smiled, and her lips opened as if to speak; but she said nothing, and as the instruments awoke with a fresh outburst, they moved off together. "You seem to be part of the music, as if I should lose you when it stops. If it would only go on forever!"

"It will for us," she said. "The music of our lives is but just begun."

"Yes, yes. I have my promise now."

Portia did not speak again. She moved like a spirit through the rest of the dance, as if she did not touch the floor with her feet. "Come," said John at last, — "come out into the darkness;" and they went out on the long veranda where other couples were pacing up and down in the moonlit spaces. He left her an instant, and, returning wrapped her in her soft white shawl.

"I saw where you put this as you came in," he said.

"Do you remember when you wrapped me in it first, that evening we drove home together?"

"Could I forget?"

"You have achieved much since then, John. This spot was so bare and ugly when you came, and now — "

"And now how bare and ugly it would still seem to me if I had not had my way this morning, — if I had not won you!"

They walked to the far end of the veranda, and stood looking off over the wonderful moonlit reaches of billowy hills into the mystery beyond. The music of the ballroom on the farther side of the building floated out to them, softened by the distance, and the rhythmic sound of dancing feet and hum of voices seemed to blend and become part of it. Soon they were alone, for the promenaders had gone either to dance or to the supper-room. Portia, standing in the strong moonlight in her filmy draperies, her face pale in the whiteness streaming upon her, and revealing its fine strength and purity of outline, seemed to be not of the earth, indeed. John felt as if he must withdraw from her, nor touch her lest she dissolve in the glorious light, and slip from him into the mysterious distances on which her eyes were fixed. She seemed so far above him, so pure and fine, could it be that she was really won? Could she ever be his?

"Portia," he said at last, "what are you thinking?"

She turned toward him with a touch that warmed him through with absolute happiness. "I was thinking, it seems as if we two were standing on the verge of eternity and the world was all behind us. Listen to them. Can there possibly be two among them all as happy as we?"

"No, nor in all the world." His voice was very low.

"I feel," she went on, "as if I had been moving in a dream ever since — in an unreal world —" she paused.

"Ever since when, my beautiful?"

"Ever since I came to you out there in Miss Katherine's garden, and gave up my pride and my scruples, and put you before all else in the world. I am so happy, John."

There was a little quiver in her voice. Ah, it was irresistible; and her cheek was warm and real, after all; and her draperies, they were easily crushed; and she stayed by him, she did not slip away into the far-off mysterious night; and for him, he led her back to the world again like a prince.

As Mrs. Marshall alighted at the door of the old home, she paused on the threshold and looked out over the scene spread before her, — the beautiful valley, with its undulating lines and pine-capped hills, — the river serenely sleeping under soft veiling mists, winding like a silver thread among them, and all bathed in the wonderful, silent glory of light. She drew in a long breath and thought of her dearest hopes. The beauty of the scene stealing in upon her senses stirred her heart to its tenderest mood; but to her, whose will was her law, to love meant to absorb to herself and hold in closer grasp; hence the subtle charm of the night but served to deepen the intensity of her desires and make her dearest hopes seem doubly dear.

"You may wait a moment, Alexander," she said. "Clare will go back with you."

"Non, non. It is that I must not leave madam alone," exclaimed Clare, struggling between her secret desire to return and her duty to her mistress. "Madam is very weary; I see it."

"Yes, and I will be asleep soon and will not want to be disturbed. You must return with the carriage and see that Marguerite comes home early. She was ill yesterday, you know."

"Oui, madam, mais — "

"Well, why don't you start?"

"Mais, allow me that I assist first madam to her bed; then is there yet time."

"I prefer to be alone. You must go back and look after her; that is what I am sending you now for. Tell Marguerite that it is my wish that she leave early. Mr. Marshall will return with her, of course; she is in his charge, but they will neither of them think of leaving until it is long past time she was here, and in bed."

"Certainement," said Clare, with a slight shrug. "They are young, those children." Still she hesitated.

"Well?" said her mistress, impatiently.

"Mais — allow me that I see madam to her room seulement."

"What ails you to-night, Clare? I am capable of going to my room alone, am I not?"

"Oui, madam, mais votre fils. What is it that he will think that I leave madam here alone?"

Mrs. Marshall laughed. "Oh, go along. You know you want to go back yourself."

So Clare was driven away as her mistress entered the house and laid her hand on the old stairway railing. The little Juliet was soundly sleeping in her mother's room, and Mrs. Van Ostade had retired. Mr. Ridgeway had gone down out of the kindness of his heart to look in on the festivities,

congratulate John and Judson Chaplain, pay his respects to the older element there, and see his granddaughter home. One servant had been left to stand guard, who was quietly dozing in the kitchen. The house was all lighted up, but seemed empty and silent. Mrs. Marshall paused and looked about her at the empty rooms and shadowy spaces. Windows had been left open, and the cool night air filled the house with a sweet freshness, in spite of the lighted lamps. The white curtains blew out over the smooth drawing-room floor, and the moon rays streamed in, making long panels of light. She climbed the stairs slowly, and paused again.

"Why did I ever sell it?" she said to herself. "I used to think I hated the place; but now I believe I would rather live here than anywhere else, after all." Then she went softly on, as was her wont. By the time she reached the top she had determined to buy it back again. "I will do it, if only to turn out this horde of plunderers," she said.

In her sitting-room a lamp was burning, and on the table lay a new novel with an antique Roman paper-knife shut in between the leaves. She sat down in the large chair beside the table, threw back the black lace wrap from her head and shoulders, and, taking the book, turned the leaves. The light fell strongly on her gray hair and wan face, with its subtle, clean-cut lines. Presently she laid the book down, folded her hands over her great black feather fan, and sat quietly thinking, looking into the past, with her brilliant dark eyes open to visions of other days.

CHAPTER XXVII

A MIDNIGHT VISIT

OVER the hill, in the moonlight, a figure came hobbling toward the old homestead, — a woman in a faded cotton gown that looked white in the white light, and a white cloth wound about her head for a turban. She leaned heavily on her stick, and hurried on eagerly and painfully. It was old Mammy Clarissa, mumbling to herself a half-pleading sort of prayer as she walked. She turned in at the arched gateway, and walked up the winding drive, her shadow falling sharply outlined on the hard gravelled road.

"Gabr'ella say as haow dey all gone 'way. I 'low she 'll be heah. She tu ol' tu be gwine tu de dancin' dese days, I reckon. Oh, Lawd, kyan' I git tu tell 'er, an' git tu pass? Lawd, he'p my soul!"

Laboriously she climbed the steps, and slipping off her heavy shoes walked softly in her stocking feet. She entered the old dwelling, and stood where she had not before since her old mistress had left it, after the general had been brought home from the field of battle, dead. There, in the great room, he had lain in state, his sword at his side, his boy far away, and none to mourn but his widowed wife and her who had nursed his child. Which grief was deeper, — who shall say?

She climbed the stairs more softly than her mistress had done a few moments before, carrying her stick under her arm and clinging to the railing for support.

"I reckon she 'll be in her ol' room," she muttered. The door of Mrs. Marshall's apartment stood ajar. She pushed it open and entered. Peering into the sitting-room beyond, she saw her old mistress seated in the halo of light, absorbed in her reverie. Frail and wan, yet not so greatly changed she seemed, since Mammy Clarissa had seen her last, only her hair was black then, a heavy silken mass falling over her temples. She had always been thin, and was always shrouded in laces, as now; only now her eyes seemed larger and darker, and her hair was gray. Suddenly she leaned forward, peering into the dimness of her chamber. Seeing the figure of the old woman standing there, she raised both hands with a quick gesture as if she would repel some phantom which she had conjured in her waking dream.

"Who are you? Go away!" she said in a sharp, frightened tone.

"Now don' yo' go fo' tu 'sturb yo'se'f. Hit 's on'y ol' Cl'issy come foh tu hab speech wid yo'."

"Clarissa, are you dead? Why do you stand so white and still? Are you alive?" She tried to rise, and would have screamed, but could not. The old woman took a step nearer, and leaning on her stick stood looking down on her. She grasped the arms of her chair with both hands, and leaning forward gazed into the face of her old slave with glittering eyes, like a lioness brought to bay.

"How dare you come here in this way? You —" Her fan slid to the floor, and Clarissa, stooping painfully, picked it up and laid it again on her knees; but she shook it from her without touching it, and again it fell to the floor, sliding down among the silken folds of her dress. Mammy Clarissa raised one hand deprecatingly.

"Now don' yo' go foh tu 'sturb yo'se'f, Miz Is'bel. I 's 'live right smaht. I done come foh tu hab speech wid yo' 'lone by yo' own se'f. I ain' no ghos'es, I ain', an' I 'low yo' ain' neider, yo' looks dat like yo' uset tu."

Mrs. Marshall relaxed her hold of her chair. "Well!" she said, "you should have had more sense than to come creeping in so, scaring me out of my wits. What do you want to say?"

Clarissa looked deliberately about her. "I reckoned I 'd fin' yo' heah, in de ol' room. Dey wan' no one roun', an' I jes' walked on up heah, like I uset tu." Then she said no more, but stood gazing gravely and steadily in the face of her former mistress.

"Don't stand staring so; sit down, and tell me how you are, and what you have come to say."

"Naw 'm, I kin stan', I reckon. I 's right smaht, thank ye, ma'm, 'cept'n' de rheumatiz in de bones, yas 'm. Wal, Miz Is'bel, I come heah fo' call tu yo' 'membrance de days 'long back in de fore time." She paused and wiped her dry lips with a handkerchief which she took, neatly folded, from her bosom. "Yas 'm, fu'st come de days when we war gals. Yo' 'membah dat time yo' paw sol' me tu mars'r gen'l's gran'paw, an' took he's fambly

an' my maw off tu de saouf islan's wha' he come f'om? — Mexico or New Awleans, some'ers daoun dat-a-way? I mind how I cried an' took on fo' my maw. I mind how yo' push me off'n her, 'nd say, 'G' 'long yo' niggah, dis-yer 's my mammy,' 'nd climb on her knee, 'nd mars' stan'nin' by an' laughin'. I mind how she sail off in de boat 'long o' yo' 'n' yo' paw 'nd maw, a-leanin' ova' dat side rail'n' an' callin' fo' me, an' yo' a-pullin' on her dress; I mind dat. Dat ar' de las' time I eva' see my maw.

"Dat fambly yo' paw done sol' me tu, dat war de ol' Ma'shall fambly. Ol' Miz Ma'shall fotch me up right smaht tu du de fine stitch'n', 'nd cl'ar sta'tchin', 'nd i'nin', an' ova'seein' de linen, an' lookin' aftah de young ones an' l'arnin' 'em tu wo'k. I nuvva woah nuffin' but silk turb'n dem days, yas 'm, 'nd white dress I al'us woah tu." She paused again, leaning heavily on her stick, and, wiping her dry lips as before, gazed straight before her in silence.

Mrs. Marshall stooped and picked up the fan. "Well, go on," she said, waving it slowly. "You have something on your mind you wish to relieve yourself of, I see, so I 'll humor you through; but I am growing tired." She leaned back, and slowly closed and opened her eyes.

"Yas 'm, I war thinkin' on dem days." Clarissa lifted her head and looked intently at her old mistress with a gleam in her eyes. "I mind de time young Mars'r John come dar tu; I mind dat." Mrs. Marshall shifted her position. "Dey wan' no young man nowhar look like he look, so tall an'

straight an' han'some, in he's so'ger clo'es w'en he come down tu visit he's gran'paw. W'en he git mad hit war like de sto'm-claoud rise out'n de sea, an' w'en he smile, yas 'm, hit war like de sun rise up in de mawnin'. I mind he had twin brudder tu. He did n' go fo' tu be no so'ger. He wen' up tu de No'f schule some'ers, 'nd he fall in lub an' mahy Yankee gal up yandah. I reckon dey war mad. I heah'd 'em say he lub de Yanks dat bad he mount stay right dar an' bed an' bo'd wid 'em, an' I nuvva see him no mo'." She paused a moment and then continued: —

"I mind de time young Mars'r John's fadah he took sick 'nd die, 'nd one y'ar mo' 'nd he's gran'-fatha he die tu, 'nd jes' one week f'om dat time ol' gran'-miz, she die tu, like she could n' lib wid'out her ol' man, — 'nd dar we-all wuz sol'. Young Mars'r John, he in de Wes' Point schule, he did n' know nuffin' 'bouts we bein' sol'. One o' dese yer trader men come 'long 'n' he tuck me. I war mighty skeered o' him. He nuvva hu't me, naw 'm, but all de same I could n' bide tu see 'im nigh me noh tu tech me.

"He tuk we-all tu mighty gran' big place, an' dar he come 'long one day, an' he say, 'Cl'issy, yo' right peart gal. What-all fo' clo'es yo' got in dat bun'l'?' An' dar he tuk up fine silk headkercher ol' missus done gib me, an' de gol' beads young Mars'r John done gib me an' a white dress, an' gol' pin — young Mars'r John gib me dat tu, — an' he say, 'W'ar dese. I wan' yo' look fine an' peart.' An' I say 'Yas 'r.' 'N' he say, 'Put 'em on.' An' I say, 'Yas 'r.' An' he holla, 'Put 'em

on.' An' I say, 'Yas 'r.' 'N' he holla 'g'in,' Put 'em on.' 'N' I say, 'Yas 'r' 'g'in, 'nd nuvva stir. Den he holla 'g'in, 'nd I say, Yo' take yo'se'f whar yo' b'long, 'n' I 'll put 'em on.' Den he lif' he's han' like he gwine hit ha'd, den he laff, 'n' say, 'Yo' done got de debble in yo'.' 'Nd I say, 'Yas 'r, 'n' yo' done put 'im dar tu.'

"Den I put on de clo'es, an' all de odah niggahs stan'in' roun' in de drove, — men, women, an' chillun. But I put 'em on, fo' I knowed I 'd be killed ef I did n'. Den he tuk me out tu de block, an' he say, 'Git up dar,' he say. An' I git up an' look roun', an' dar I see all de man faces lookin' up at me all ova de squ'ar, an' all ova de sidewalkses, an' dar dey point wid de cane. Den one say, 'She got a heap o' temper, I reckon.' An' trader man, he say, 'She mil' as lamb.' Den nurrer man say, 'She got de bery debble in 'er eye.' An' he say, 'She hab de spi't ob a angel, an' she kin sing yo's tu sleep like she bohned a mocker.' Den dey all laff, an' I feel like I gwine fall down off'n dat place. Den, all 'er a suddent, I see young Mars'r John yandah in de crowd, in he's so'ger clo'es, wid he's shinin' face, like he jes' come down f'om heaben, — an' I hol' out my ahms an' try fo' tu call 'im; but I could n' make no soun'. Naw 'm. But I see 'im push he's way t'rough all dem rats dar, nigh head taller 'n all on 'em, yas 'm, an' I see 'im hol' up he's han', an' I see all de faces swimmin' roun', an' de block slip out f'om under my feet like, an' I did n' see no mo' ontwell I heah'n 'im sayin', 'Wake up, Cl'issy. Dey ain' gwine sell

yo' no mo'. I done pay de money fo' yo', an' I gwine tek yo' home wid me. Jes' yo' folla me.' I 'd a folla'd 'im ef he 'd 'a' axed me tu walk intu de fiah. I 'd folla'd 'im ontwell I could n' walk no mo' an' jes' fall down dead at he's feet 'fo' 'im, yas 'm. Dat ar hu-cum de Mars'r Gen'l buy me an' tuk me home. Ol' miz, she rose me mighty kin' an' sof' like. I nuvva did n' look tu be sol' like common niggah trash off'n de block, naw 'm." She paused again, and wiped her brow and her lips. Mrs. Marshall leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. "Go on," she said. "I hear you."

"Yas 'm, wal 'm, hit war dat-a-way he tuk me home, an' I tuk keer on he's maw. She war sof' an' gentle like she wait'n' fo' de angels tu come an' fotch her tu heaben. Likely dat all she wait'n' fo'. She lie dar one day an' jes' pass like a breff come an' blow her soul 'way, an' dar dey wan' no one lef' but jes' young Mars'r Gen'l an' me, an' a lot o' young trash niggahs wha' I look aftah an' l'arn fo' tu keep de haouse fo' 'im. Young Mars'r Gen'l, he grieve he's se'f, I mind dat. Long while he grieve. He go heah, an' he go dar, an' ev'y time he come home 'g'in he say, 'Cl'issy, dis-yer 's de bes' place, aftah all.' Aftah while he brung home de ol' haouse full o' he's frien's. He jes' say, 'Cl'issy, git de rooms ready;' an' I du hit, an' cook de chick'n pie, an' de hot biscuit, an' dar de happy days begin. Nigh on tu five y'ar he go on dat-a-way; I war right happy den, yas 'm, right happy. One day come 'long big crowd f'om Wash'n'ton. I mind yo' 'long dat time. I don'

know whar he met up wid yo', but dar yo' come wid yo' maids an' yoah gran' clo'es shinin' wid de silk an' gol', an' yo' walk de haouse like yo' done bohned dar, — yas 'm, — de same li'l' Miz Is'bel wha' done push me off'n my own maw. I knowed yo' 'd done come fo' tek young Mars'r Gen'l f'om me tu. Now jes' yo' bide still dar. I ain' come fo' no hu't. I come heah fo' tu bring yo' min' back tu de 'membrance o' de pas', an' yo' gwine set still dar an' hark.

"W'en dat crowd go Mars'r John, he mighty res'less. One day he walk de flo' up an' down, up an' down, den he come out on de po'ch whar I set sewin' an' harkin' tu 'im pace de room, an' he say, 'Cl'issy, yo' allus been mighty good; yo' been good tu my maw.' An' I say, 'Yas, Mars'r John.' Den he say, 'Hit 's time I marr'd 'nd raise up my fadah's haouse. I gwine bring home heah a mistus, Cl'issy.' An' I say, 'Yas, yas, Mars'r John.' Den he say, 'Yo' gwine be good tu her, Cl'issy?' An' I say, 'Yas, Mars'r John, I gwine du all yo' ax me. Ef yo' ax me walk intu de fiah, I du hit.'

"Den he come nigh me, an' put he's han' under my chin, an' lif' up my haid, an' say, 'Cl'issy, I b'lieve yo'.' An' he kiss my fo'haid an' go off. Den I go tu my own room, an' dar I lie on de flo', an' ax de Lawd tek de h'a't out 'n me an' leab me die an' go tu ol' mist'is; but he did n' du hit, naw 'm, he done leab me heah yit. W'en Mars'r John come back he fotch yo' wid 'im, an' dar come 'long lot o' yo' own folkses tu — gran' an' fine, an' sof'-speakin' like yo' own se'f. I could n' un'erstan' how dey speak, neider. Hit mighty strange

talk dey done use. I reckon yo' 'membahs dat time tu, Miz Is'bel, — yas, I reckon so. Yo' mighty fine fo' a while, den yo' tek de bit in yo' teef, 'an dar yo' go. Yo' mind de days Mars'r Gen'l go tu Wash'n'ton? Yo' mind how yo' run de place, Miz Is'bel? Yas, I reckon so. Look a-heah, — don' yo' go fo' tu git 'sited. I jes' gwine tell yo' de troof, den I gwine quit."

Mammy Clarissa stopped leaning on her stick, and raised herself to her full height. Her eyes glowed like two coals of fire. She ceased speaking in a dreamy tone of reflection and reminiscence. "Look a-heah," she said in louder tone, "yo' mind de time yo' beat me an' sta've me? Yo' mind de time yo' git ol' Pete tu lay on de lash tu me? Yo' mind dat? An' why fo' yo' done hit? Look a-heah." She crossed the room and opened a door that led into a small brushing-room or closet, and, stooping over, looked closely at the bare boards, where a dark brown stain showed.

"Yas 'm, hit dar as of ol' time. Dar de blood-stain yit. Yo' 'membah dat time yo' tu'n on me an' cut me wid Mars'r John's hunt'n' knife? Heah 's de skyah 'crost my ahm yit, an' at de jedgmen' day dat skyah gwine shine in yo' eyes. I mind de time yo' cut dat skyah an' push me in dar, an' lock de do'. I min' lyin' dar wid de blood flowin' an' hyar'n' yo' walkin' roun' in de room, singin' sof' an' low like nuffin' did n' trouble yo' none; an' dar yo' lef' me all night, 'n' no watah tu drink, 'n' nuffin' tu eat, 'n' no one tu he'p. Dar de blood-stain yit. Hit ain' nuvva

come off, an' hit nuvva will come off, 'dout fiah bu'n hit.

"Set yo'se'f still dar ontwell yo' heah de res'. Nex' day yo' done de same, — yo' heah me groan an' call fo' one drap o' watah. Yo' nuvva onlock de do', an' de nex' day yo' go 'way wid de key in yo' pocket, an' I try fo' call, but did n' hab no strenk. I 'low yo' did n' reckon Mars'r John com'n' home dat day, but he come; yas 'm, he come an' call yo', an' Cah'line she tell 'im Miz Is'bel done gone ovah tu Miz Col'n'l Wells fo' de day. An' he come in heah an' sit down, an' I mek out fo' tu speak he's name, an' he try de do'. Den he call, 'Cah'line, hu-come dis do' lock? Wha 's de key?' An' she say, 'I do' know, Mars'r Gen'l.' Den Mars'r John he know dar somp'n' bad duin', an' he bre'k de doah, an' tek me up in he's ahms, an' tote me tu my own baid, an' lay me dar, an' brung watah, an' keer fo' me de whole day, ontwell night come, an' he say ovah an' ovah, 'Cl'issy, she shall pay fo' dis.' Yas 'm, dat what he say. I kin 'membah dat.

"Naw yo' doan move, noh speak neider. Yo' set yo'se'f dar an' hark. Cah'line, ol' Alexandah's wife, she kin 'membah dat tu, an' mo', I reckon. I do' know what-all Mars'r done say tu yo', but yo' nuvva tech me 'g'in. Naw 'm. I mind dem days; how I done de fine stitch'n' fo' yo', wha' ol' Miz Ma'shall l'arn me tu du. All de long, sof' fine clo'es fo' yo' baby, I done de stitch'n' on dem. Yas 'm, an' I mind how," — Mammy Clarissa dropped her voice to a lower tone, — "w'en de day war done, an' yo' could n' task me

no mo', while yo' lay sleepin' 'long side Mars'r John, I uset tu sit by de can'l' light an' sew de co'se white cloff ontwell de daylight streak de sky in de mawnin'. Yas 'm, de time pass slow, wid de days a-servin' an' de nights a-cryin', ontwell yo' 'low I gwine spile my eyes fo' de fine stitch'n', an' yo' gwine sell me off Saouf C'liny way.

"I mind de night tu, yas 'm, I mind hit, w'en my baby come. Ol' Aunt Betsy, f'om Cun'l Wellses, she war by me, troo de bitterness, and de darkness, and de heavy-heartness, an' fo' daylight she done lef' me dar wid my own li'l' chile in my ahms, an' I lie in de dark time, an' pray de Lawd tek 'im out'n de worl' an' tek me wid 'im; but he did n' nuvva hearn me; naw 'm, he lef' me dar, an' de chile tu. W'en de mawnin' come, I lif' up de kiver, an' look at my chile, lyin' dar in my ahms, an' I see a angel f'om heaben. I see why de Lawd would n' tek 'im long back 'g'in, 'case he jes' been dar, wid he's sof' skin, an' fa'r ha'r like de sun done tech hit, an' w'en he open he's gre't eyes, dar dey shine wid de blue in 'em, yas 'm, an' I cry out in my h'a't, an' kiver 'im up an' hol' 'im clost. O Lawd, O Lawd! I mind dat time. I reckon yo' don' 'membah dat, naw 'm.

"I mind I lie dar, an' shet my eyes 'g'in, an' 'long 'bouts sun-up de do' open mighty ha'd an' suddent like, an' dar come ol' Mars'r Doctor, wid de bun'l' in he's ahms, an' he lay hit 'long side me, an' he say, 'Cl'issy, heah 's yo' missus' baby. Yo' tek right smaht keer on hit now.' An' he stomp off 'g'in, an' shet de do' ha'd, an' I hyearn 'im stompin' down de hall. Den I lif' myse'f up

an' open de bun'l', an' dar, jes' wrop in a cloff like, an' roll in de blanket, lie yo' baby. Yas 'm, yo' baby, sho 'nuff, wid de dark skin an' de black, sof' ha'r like all yo' folkses wha' come up heah f'om de Saouf Islands, an' like yo'se'f tu, wid de big dark eyes, like de black coals out'n de fiah, look'n' up at me, an' I kiver hit up 'g'in, an' hol' my chile clost, an' cry out in my h'a't 'g'in, 'O Lawd, set my chile free. Tek 'im back, Lawd. Don' leab 'im heah, 'case I knowed yo' chile done come tu rob my chile like yo' rob me.'

"Naw 'm, set yo'se'f still. I has mo' tu tell. By 'm by Cah'line come in, an' I lie dar wid my eyes shet, an' she onkiver yo' baby, an' she say, 'Cl'issy, dis yo' chile?' an' I lie still. Den she step roun' mighty sof' an' mek fiah, an' wahm de watah, an' by 'm by she onkiver bof de chillen, an' I lie dar wid my eyes shet, an' a mighty so' hea't, an' she stan' dar lookin' at de chillen sleepin' so sof' 'n' still. Den she reach ovah an' tek my chile out'n my ahms, an' tek hit 'way by de fiah, an' I did n' open my eyes noh say nuffin'. I jes' lay dar wid de heavy-heartness ontwell I done drap off tu sleep sho 'nuff. A'ter a w'ile I done heah a baby cryin', an' I open my eyes an' dar stan' Cah'line side de baid wid bun'l' wrop up in de co'se cloff, an' she say, 'Cl'issy, heah, yo' tek yo' own chile; he nigh stahvin', I reckon. Missus' baby don' need nuf'n'. He sleep'n' heah all right;' an' she lay de bun'l' in my ahms, an' I tu'n back de cloff off'n de haid, an' dar I see yo' chile; yas'm, yo' chile dress' in de co'se cloff wha' I done sew fo' my own, in de night times w'en yo' war

sleep'n'. Wid de tears a-fallin' an' de hea't a-grieve'n', I done sew dose clo'es, an' dar I see 'em on yo' chile. Yas 'm, set yo'se'f still dar an' hark. I done tek yo' chile in my ahms an' heish 'im tu sleep, an' Cah'line, she step roun' sof' an' men' de fiah, an' bresh de hyarth, an' go off. Den I rose up an' look at my own li'l' baby, an' dar he lie in de sof', white clo'es, wid de lace, an' de fine wo'k wid de needle wha' I done sew, an' I say, 'De Lawd done do de choosin'. I done sew de clo'es, bof de co'se an' de fine, an' de Lawd done guide de han' wha' put 'em on de chillen. Ef hit ain' nuffin' but de clo'es wha' gib de chile a place in dis worl', ef dey don' know no dif'unce, 'cept'n' dat ar, den de Lawd's name be praise. Ef one o' dese chillen gwine be mars', an' one gwine be slave, an' one fadah de fadah ob bof, den de Lawd's name be praise, dey kin du dey own choos'n'. By 'm by Cah'line come back an' brung me victuals, an' she stan' dar, lookin' at my boy, an' she says, ' 'Pears like he don' look like her none, but he mighty puty.' An' I say, 'Sholy he are.' An' she say, 'Missus done ax fo' 'im,' an' she cahy 'im out." Old Clarissa paused, and once again wiped her face and lips with the handkerchief.

The old woman before her, writhing with passion, had repeatedly struggled to rise from her chair, but seemed unable to do so. Now she stood up, and reaching toward her old slave with her long thin fingers, made as if she would clutch her by the throat.

"You devil!" she said between her closed teeth, and fell back into her seat, exhausted by her own rage.

"Da 's right, Miz Is'bel. Set yo'se'f dar. I ain' come heah fo' no hu't. I come heah tu git shet o' dis-yer wha' I done cahy on my hea't like a stone o' lead all dese yeahs. I come heah fo' tell yo' de troof an' git 'lowed tu pass. Dey ain' nuvva been nobody on dis yearth wha' knowed dis heah on'y me, an' now I done tole yo' I reckon de Lawd gwine 'low me tu die some time, an' go tu ol' missus. I mine de time yo' mek me mahy ol' brudder Thomas Ma'hshall. Yo' done dat 'case yo' hate me, make me mahy de brackes' niggah on de place. Da 's all right. He war mighty good man. He done tol' me lub dem dat hate me. Du good tu dem dat 'spitefully uses me, an' I done hit. I done l'arn dat ar. I fo'gib yo' long w'ile 'go, but yo' wan' heah, an' I could n' tell yo' de troof ontwell yo' come home 'g'in. Mars' Gen'l he lie dar in de grabeya'd wha' dey done tuk 'im, an' he's soul wait'n' de day ob jedgmen', an' 'fo' long yo' gwine lie dar tu, I reckon, an' now I done tol' yo' de troof, I 'low I kin be let tu pass f'om dis low worl' an' go home one o' dese days, — Lawd he'p my soul! An' w'en we-all stan' dar fo' de gre't w'ite t'rone, may de good Lawd he'p yo' soul tu. I 'low I done sin a gre't sin, but I done 'fess hit 'fo' yo', an' 'fo' de God ob heaben, an' he wha' sit on de t'rone, he kin look intu de hea't, an' he kin jedge 'twixt us an' Mars' Gen'l tu. Oh, good Lawd, Mars' Gen'l done sin tu! Ef yo' mus' strike him, Lawd, le' me b'ar de blow." She turned away with this prayer, without regarding the old woman before her further.

Slowly she crept down the stairs, replaced her

shoes at the door, and left the house as she had come.

Suddenly Mrs. Marshall raised herself. The storm within her had not subsided. She breathed heavily, and with difficulty. Her face turned a dull purple hue. She threw up her arms and tried to run after her old slave, and taking a step or two forward, fell prone across the threshold of her door. There, when they returned from the ball-room, half an hour later, they found her lying. In one hand she held the paper-knife, clutched like a dagger.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A BITTER CUP

MRS. MARSHALL lay in her room, silent as death; never a word, never a movement of her helpless body, even to so much as the lifting of a finger. Her tortured spirit was held in a silent prison. Her slight hands, folded among the soft white laces of her sleeves, seemed only a part of them, so still and nerveless they lay.

Her hair, which had showed traces of its youthful blackness and lustre, became in a week as white as frosted silver. Only her dark eyes, glowing with an eager fire, searching the faces about her, noting with intent alertness all that passed, never closing, always watching, betrayed the suffering soul within.

A local physician was called without delay, and another came from New York, at great expense. What should they do? Should they take her to a sanatorium, — a hospital? How could they help her? They would be guided by him, would do anything he said, — but, alas! he said: "Let her be; she is better off where she is."

There was nothing to be done but what a well-trained nurse could do. He would send them one.

Was there no hope? None. She might be relieved somewhat, but any sudden change for the

better would be apt to be followed by as sudden a decline, and possibly death.

However, there was no telling; she might live months, nay, years.

"Oh, poor, poor aunty!" sobbed Marguerite, kneeling beside her, with her arm thrown over the thin, nerveless body. "Dear aunty, you are looking at me; you know we love you even if we have been perverse. Aunty dear, if you know I love you and am sorry, shut your eyes. That will be a sign to me that you hear me, and understand."

The great eyes slowly closed, and slowly opened again, and Marguerite kissed her.

Then John returned from his consultation with the physician, and Marguerite, resting her head against his arm, wept again.

"John, if we could only have pleased her, — but we could not."

"No, little sister, we could not," he said tenderly. "Come away," and they went into the next room.

"John, you are all I have now. I am all, all alone."

"Marguerite, look into my eyes and tell me the truth. Is it I whom you love best in the world? Is there no one else who is dearer, just a little dearer, it may be?"

"My heart aches so, — oh, it aches so, John. I never dreamed such a terrible thing as this could come upon us. It is n't a punishment, is it?"

"No, no, dear. Why should you be punished? Now won't you answer my question?"

Marguerite dried her eyes and looked away.

Then turning, she put her hand in John's, and looking straight in his face, said, "Yes, John. You know there is one — one — dearer even than you are. I will be true. I will never pretend anything any more."

"Then may he come in and speak to you? He is waiting to see you. Poor fellow! he has waited ever since that terrible night just to say one word of comfort. Dr. Holmes says this may result fatally now, or may not. We must take what comes as God's will, and for ourselves, we must do what we know is right by those we love. Will you see him, Marguerite?"

"Yes."

"Then, little sister, I 'll ask him to come to you;" and he turned toward the door.

"Wait, John," she said; and he came back again. "I am not sending you away from me, John; I want you to know that you are dear to me too," she said tearfully. "I am not ungrateful. Stoop down." He bent his head towards her, and taking his face between her two hands she kissed him. "There, now go," she said; and he went, humbled in his heart. Had he always been just to this impetuous little soul, struggling through false teaching and almost every hampering circumstance to find its true light? He feared not. Thank God there had been one able, imperfectly, perhaps, to sound its depths.

His friend was pacing restlessly up and down the long hall. John laid his hand on his arm and said gravely, "You may go to her. She will see you," and passed on.

When Hanford entered he found her standing as John had left her, in the middle of the room, with flushed cheeks and tearful eyes. He held out his arms, and she came to them, — the arms that had opened once to set her free.

The fall days crept on, and the heat waxed greater, and then gradually lessened, and the silent splendor of the autumn stole over the hills and valleys, and the summer boarders dropped off, a few at a time, until the great house was left nearly empty. Portia had leisure now for thinking and dreaming, for driving with John over the dear old mountain roads, and for her grandfather's pleasure also. The sweet tones of his violin might be heard at almost any hour, penetrating like rays of sunlight through the gloom.

There was always a happy light in Portia's eyes these days, and her voice seemed to grow fuller and richer.

They were standing on the hillside one day, she and John. Her hands were full of the late chrysanthemums, — a glowing mass of color.

"What are you going to do with these?" he asked.

"Come with me, and I will show you," she replied. She led him over the brambly hillside until they came to a small cleared space, where were two or three low mounds fenced in. One seemed to have been made years before, and was almost effaced, but was marked by a rude headboard which had been painted white. The other seemed to have been more recently made. The red soil was not yet overrun with weeds and brambles.

"Here it is, — the place where they laid that white-headed old preacher," she said. Dividing her flowers, she laid part of them at the foot of the weather-beaten headboard, and the rest she placed on the old man's grave. "I come here every week. I have never been able, quite, to get that scene off my mind: that night when he was shot, you know. It hangs like a shadow in the midst of my happiness. I have been so happy, John;" she slipped her hand into his. "You know that tragedy, after all, was the beginning of our knowing each other."

"The beginning of our happiness was long before that, when you came upon me there in Germany; and next, when I sat alone out in the darkness, and you sang to me; and again, when you ran out early in the morning and sang to me. You see the happy beginning was made long before this ever happened. There is no shadow hanging over you."

"Yes, I suppose it did, for you, John. Don't think me morbid; I am the happiest woman on earth. These are all the flowers I shall have to put here this year. By next week they may all be gone."

"Miss Mann," he said, reading the name that was painted on the headboard. "Why do you put them on this grave?"

"Have n't you heard of her? She came down here, and literally sacrificed herself for the colored people. I have heard them tell about her. She lived among them, taught them, and finally died among them."

John looked at her in some surprise. "You have changed in your feelings, then, toward them, since we had our first talk together?"

"Why, no, I can't really say that I have. I am fighting away at my prejudices, however."

"Why do you? They are only natural."

"Are they natural, or from wrong education? I have my theories, you know, and am trying to live up to them."

"You beautiful little Puritan!" he said, laughing, and drawing her toward him. "Come away from here. Tell me, what are your theories?"

"For one thing, I think we have wrong estimates in this world."

"More so than in other worlds of your experience?"

Portia laughed. "Yes. We are to graduate out of this into another where prejudices have no part. It will not be, 'What color are you?' or, 'What occupation have you?' or, 'How much money have you?' but, 'What are you?'"

"So you are fighting your prejudices beforehand. Are you really sure you have any?"

"Yes."

"Ah! I am glad."

"Glad to discover weaknesses in me that are unworthy? Why?" She stood on a great boulder looking down on him.

"Because —" he held out his hand to assist her down, and springing, she landed in his arms instead of on the ground.

"Put me down, John; for shame."

"Because," he went on, "if you have not a few

frailties, how am I going to keep you in this world with me? Cling to your prejudices, by all means."

She burst into merry laughter. "No, Mr. John. It is my privilege to hide my weaknesses from you. You will discover them soon enough."

"Now as we walk home talk about the future," he said.

"How can we?"

"Why, this way. You set the wedding day, and I, as the architect, will begin building us a castle in Spain."

"Very well; then I will say next June."

"What?"

"Next June."

"Why not wait forever? Say next Christmas, and I can count the time by days instead of months."

"But there will be so much to arrange."

"Not at all. Consider. My hotel has taken your occupation from you; the proprietor is already in it, and has ruined your business. What is there for you to arrange? There is nothing left you but to take up a new career. You are to go to Europe, and finally are to astonish the world. You are to be the finest artist living, and I am to dance attendance as your humble and devoted slave. Thousands, nay, millions, will flock to hear you. The world will bow down at your feet."

"John, stop this nonsense," she said, laughing. "Can't you think of a greater career for me?"

"Yes, my Puritan, yes."

"To be your wife, and the mistress of your home, John?"

"Yes, you read me right. Selfish creatures we men are."

"Selfish to bestow on me the greatest honor a man can? Oh, John, you hardly read me aright."

"You never quite said those words with me I once asked you to say."

"No? Then I will say them now. 'No power on earth shall take me from you, John.' Are those the words?"

"Yes, and for me I have said them over and over: 'No power on earth shall take you from me, Portia.' Then at Christmas, shall we say?"

"Let us begin the new year together."

"As you say." He looked at her, walking at his side, with quiet happiness shining in his eyes.

"And let us not build any more castles in Spain now because of your mother."

"Yes, she must be prepared. I will do it very gently. I think she will understand."

They walked on in silence, and when they reached home a few raindrops were pattering down on the fallen leaves.

Thus the days slipped away. Now it was John and Portia, and now it was Hanford and Marguerite who were building castles in Spain. The double wedding day was set; it was coming on apace. The old woman still lay in her chamber of silence, like death in life. Her restless eyes searched every face that entered, as if vainly seeking one who could interpret her thoughts for her. Clare and the medical nurse watched over her every comfort, and Marguerite sat by her side, faithfully trying to anticipate her wishes. She worked at

her embroidery there. Sometimes she read to her. "If you understand and like it, aunty dear, close your eyes once;" and slowly her eyes would close and open again. "And if you are tired, aunty, close and open them twice." This was her only means of communication with those around her.

One day John stood by the side of her bed. He had been walking, and was warm, for the December sun shone, and although it was late the frosts had not yet come to nip things. His hair was damp and clung to his forehead and temples. He pushed back the clustering mass that had been pressed down by his hat, and wiped his brow and neck with his handkerchief. As he looked down on her, he smiled. It was a smile full of tenderness and love.

"Mother dear, if I could I would give you part of my health and vigor," he said. Ah, he was beautiful to look at as he stood there in his strength. "I would take you up in my arms and carry you out in the sunlight. You are so light I could do it easily, right here on the upper veranda. Would you like it?" She closed her eyes.

"Nurse," he called, "can I take mother out in the sun a moment, here on the gallery?"

"You can't mean it!" she said, entering quickly from another room.

"Yes, see how warm it is." So they wrapped her carefully in a soft, clinging blanket, and he carried her out through the double French window.

"The air is sweet, mother, and you are not heavy." He paced up and down, holding her as if she were a child. "I must do this every day now.

Perhaps it may give you strength to speak to us again."

Marguerite and Hanford were walking in the paths, among the dropping autumn leaves, arm in arm. She saw them, and her eyes wandered from them to John's face.

"It is all right, mother dear. Try to feel that it is."

Mr. Ridgeway and his daughter sat on the lower veranda. The murmur of their voices came up to them. Presently Mr. Ridgeway spoke out in a little louder tone.

"The day is drawing very near now," he said. "It makes me a little sad, but I would not have her see it."

John walked to the farther end of the gallery, and Mrs. Van Ostade's low reply was lost. As he paced back the grandfather spoke again, —

"It is n't that I regret it, Clara; John is a noble fellow, and her happiness is dearer to me than my own."

Once more the low reply was lost, and John carried his mother back and laid her on the bed again. Her eyes were fixed steadily on his, as if she would pierce him through. He knew she had comprehended. The nurse had stepped away for a moment, and he arranged the pillows and clothing and placed the poor helpless body in an easy posture, and folded her thin white hands over the counterpane with the deft, gentle touch of a woman.

"Listen, mother. It is best for both of us. Try to feel that it is. Let nothing trouble you, mother dear. Try only to recover enough to speak

to us again, and tell us that it is right. It is best for Marguerite, believe me, it is."

Suddenly a dark purple flush suffused her face, and he noticed that her lips were moving. His heart gave a sudden bound, and slipping his hand under the pillow he lifted her head and put his ear close to try to catch her words; and he did, and the curse they brought him as they were whispered, half hissed at him.

"Better for — her — for Mar — Marguerite, — yes — you — you — are not my — son you — have robbed — him of — his po — position, his — birth — right — of his in — heritance you — you — are part of the devil's — own brood — I — I — hate you — as I hated — her — who bore you. — Go to your old — old dam — and wring — the truth — from her and — then — kill her and never — say the word — mother — of me again — nor let — me see — your face — again — go."

Her face became pallid once more. She ceased speaking, and closed her eyes. He laid her down again, still gently, and tried to call the nurse, but had no voice. Presently he regained self-control, and finding her sent her to the bedside, and went into the garden to Marguerite.

"Mother has spoken a few words," he said. "Go to her quickly. She may have something to say to you." He was deathly pale. Oh, the force of habit! He had called her mother again. Marguerite hurried in, and Hanford, noticing his agitation, started to follow John, as he walked away, but, prompted by his inner consciousness, as quickly stopped and remained where he was.

John strode rapidly along, conning the words he had just heard. "Perhaps she was just raving," he thought, — but they had come to him so distinctly; they had fallen like drops of liquid fire into his soul. Did she mean Mammy Clarissa? He would go to her and learn the truth. But there was no truth in it. His mother's reason was gone. He came to the foot log over the stream, and paused. Here was the place where he had told his love to Portia on that sweet spring morning. The stream rushed on, tumbling and foaming over the rocks, careless of human love or human sorrow, and yet it seemed to voice the tumult of his spirit now, even as it had seemed to voice, on that fair, early morning, the impetuous rush of his happy heart.

Mechanically he crossed the log and walked on to the little clearing. There were two cabins there now, and an addition to the log stable for Gabriella's cow. Josephus was living comfortably beside his mother in his own little cabin, with his two mules all paid for. John had given him work and good pay all summer. No one was about. Gabriella was singing a hymn to a tune full of quavers as she prepared Josephus' supper.

John crossed the yard and entered Clarissa's cabin. "I will go in, at any rate, and see her now that I am here," he said to himself.

"Is yo' come, honey?" She was seated bent over the embers, and stirred them into a bright blaze. "O Lawd! Yo' is dat like yo' paw w'en he come an' paid de money fo' me dat time! Draw up yo' cheer, honey," and he did so.

Ah, how often when he was a child he had turned away from his mother's reproofs and found comfort in her arms! How often, when he was weary, he had climbed into her lap and rested his head on her bosom, and fallen peacefully to sleep, listening to her crooning.

He remained in the cabin, questioning her and listening to her now, for over an hour; and when he came out he closed the door softly after him, and walked off down the road reeling like a drunken man, staggering under a load that he felt himself in his strength too weak to carry. When he reached the stream he was too weary and heavy to go farther. He stretched himself on the ground face downward, and the darkness slowly and silently closed over him like a mantle of sorrow. He heard the ceaseless noise of the water like the rushing and crowding and striving of human hearts, ever pushing and hurrying to their doom, and ever crying out in the darkness. Were all the demons of hell let loose upon him? What should he do? "Curse God and die?"

His temptation came upon him swift and terrible. Why should he not cover all this up in his heart and let everything go on as before. Was it not God's will? "Bury it," said the tempter within him. "Who will know?" But the still small voice of his heart said, "Shall I rob my brother, and know it?" And all night long the fires burned in his spirit until it was purged and laid bare before his Creator.

All night he lay there fighting with evil, for it was heavy upon him and beset him sore. As the

dawn began to glow in the east a sleep of exhaustion fell upon him, and in his sleep it seemed a spirit came to him holding a whip of small cords, with which it drove away the darkness and demons that had surrounded him during the night; and then it seemed a voice spoke words of comfort in his ears, — words he had often heard, unthinking of their meaning, from the pulpit, when the scriptures were read; and then it seemed a voice like Portia's took them up and sang them; and in his restless sleep he seemed to see a woman stand where the spirit had stood, pale and sad, and very beautiful, and that as she bent above him her tears fell upon him, and he could hear her weeping, and that he tried to reach out to her, to touch her hand, but could not; then he seemed to hear the sound of the whirring of many wings, and he awoke, and only the sound of the rushing water was in his ears.

He rose, and went to the stream and bathed his face and cooled his throbbing temples. "My God," he said, "if I had yielded, how could I ever have gone to her with a lie in my heart? Her eyes would have searched it out. If I were to kiss her with the lie on my lips, they would have blackened her."

He walked on, stronger now; his brow was clear and his face very pale. He looked older, but he had conquered. He did not go to Mrs. Wells, but took his way to the old home. What to do in the immediate future he knew not, but he seemed irresistibly drawn back to the scene of his desolation. Clare met him at the door.

"How is she?" he asked mechanically.

"La madam? Ze is dead." She spoke in a whisper, as if she feared the dead might hear.

Mechanically, still, he walked up to her room. The medical nurse was there, stepping softly about.

"I am glad you are come," she said. "Mr. Ridgeway was just going for you. She has not opened her eyes since you left yesterday. She stopped breathing an hour ago."

He stood beside the bed looking down on her. So his was the last face she had looked on; how changed, now, since he stood there yesterday, in all the buoyancy of power and happiness! He felt himself old, and scarce thinking what he did, he passed his hand over his face, half expecting to find it wrinkled and drawn. Marguerite came and stood beside him silently weeping. Presently Hanford entered and stood on the other side. John felt his eyelids hot and dry. No tears came to his eyes as he looked down on her whom from childhood he had called mother. Her face had not the peaceful calm upon it usual in bodies from which the spirit has fled; it looked distorted and drawn, as if worried with pain. He could stand it no longer and walked away. In the upper hall he met Mrs. Van Ostade. She came up to him, holding out both hands. He took them and held them in his.

"We all love you, John. We would help you if we could."

"I know it, I know it," he said; and for the first time he kissed her. "Remember, always remember, that your generous, sweet loving was

returned tenfold," he said, and left her. In the drawing-room he found Portia, as he had found her on the day of Mrs. Marshall's arrival, arranging and putting away her music, only now she was pale, and her hands trembled. Death had entered the house. He paused on the threshold, but she came quickly and drew him to a seat beside her. Ah, the healing in that firm, gentle touch!

"I have been waiting for you here, John," she said, and then sat silent, holding his hand in hers. She was timid in the presence of his sorrow, so different from what she thought, and yet so much greater than she could know. "This grief should be mine also, John," she said at last. "I would help you bear it."

"No, dearest, you will have your own to bear, and they will be heavy enough. Promise me that whatever comes you will not try to carry mine." He took her face in his hands and looked bravely and tenderly into her eyes. "Promise me, my beautiful."

"I can't, John; the words we said together that day make it impossible. Your sorrows are to be mine forever. Where would be the sweetness of loving if it were not so?"

"Forgive me, forgive me, darling. I made you say them. Oh, forgive me!" He bowed his head and walked wearily away.

In the garden Hanford was waiting for him. "Let me do anything for you that must be done," he said kindly. "Are there telegrams to be sent?"

"None. She had no friends," he said bitterly,

shaking off the friendly hand on his shoulder, and walked on. Instantly he turned back. "Forgive me; I have a heavier load to bear than you dream of. Yes. Take care of all these things for me, and — well — you will know what to do. She is to be laid beside my father, of course." He wrung the hand held out to him. "You have always been more than a friend to me, Hanford," and he walked away. Again he turned back. "Let the funeral be soon, — immediately the arrangements can be made. We must relieve the family of the gloom as soon as possible."

Faint and exhausted, he went to his room and lay down. Presently came a gentle knock at his door. He opened it, and there stood Miss Katherine with his breakfast, the fragrant coffee steaming in her daintiest china.

"You were not down to breakfast with us," she said, "and I thought you might not be well." Then looking up she noted his face and started. "John, what is it? Tell me."

He could not open his lips yet upon his terrible secret. He took the tray from her and placed it on the table. "She is dead," was all he said.

"Who is, John? Have you been out this morning, and without your breakfast?" Strange to say, she thought first of Portia; the death of his mother it was reasonable to expect, but the expression of his face seemed to go beyond a reasonable grief. How could he answer her? He could not say of the woman who was gone, "my mother;" the sweetness of that word, to utter, would never be his again.

"My father's wife. She is dead; is to be laid by his side at last."

"Your mother? But that was to be expected, John," she said in tenderest reproof. "You should not grieve so now that she suffers no more. Eat; you have been without food too long. Where were you at supper?"

"I — I don't know. Oh, yes, I remember. Yes, I will eat now. I need food. I don't seem to be able to talk now."

She busied herself pouring his coffee and placing his plate. Her eyes swam in tears, but she said nothing. He was touched by her sympathetic silence.

"In my boyhood I brought my troubles to you, Katherine; but now, sweet as your friendship is, I have one I must bear alone."

"You may think you are bearing it alone, but you won't be, John."

"That is the bitterness of it," he cried, and bowed his head in his hand. "Good God! if I could only bear it alone!"

"Why, John, is n't that almost wicked?"

"No, it is righteous."

"But, John, in this house you are in Donald's place. Would you have it otherwise?"

He could not answer her. His tongue clove to his mouth, and he moistened his lips with water. "To-morrow, no, the day after, we — we will talk. After she is laid away. Now I cannot, only of your goodness to me, — yours and your mother's."

"No, not of that. Eat now, and when you can, come down to ma; she will know what to say."

John was right. There are paths where man must tread alone. No human soul can go with him into the deeps, and only God can send light to his feet. That day, and the next, and the next, crept painfully, heavily by, like mourners in a funeral train. Then John gathered himself together to meet the future.

"Shall you take up your profession again, Hanford?" he asked, when the earth had fallen at last, covering her whom all his life he had called mother.

"I am thinking of it. And you?"

"If you were, I was thinking I would ask you — my friend — my more than friend —" He stopped. His voice was hard and his lips were dry. How could he tell his bitter secret, which had not yet been told — but tell it he must. "I would ask you to take charge of some business for me, if you were — that I can trust to no one else. May we go to my room? I have all my papers there."

And there, in Donald's old room, John learned, as few in this world ever do learn, the value of a friend. After it was all over, and the secret told, and Hanford gone, John tried to write to Portia. Once and again he took the pen, but his hand trembled, and he laid it down. Finally, finding his weakness greater than his strength, knowing what he must do, but holding back, he fell on his knees. He found no words in which to speak to his Creator; only in his heart was one cry, — "Christ, Thou hast suffered; Thou too!" and this cry of his heart seemed to bring him the calmness he needed. Once more he took up the pen and

simply and truly told her the story of his life, and how at last the truth had been revealed to him.

"And now, beautiful spirit whom I love, turn from me. My life has been a dream, an unreality. I have usurped from another who has been degraded in my place. Let me drop out of your life as dreams drop out of the heart they have stirred and troubled. Weep for me, beautiful Portia, but be not sorrowful for me overmuch, — let me die in thy tears. My love for thee is all that lives within me. I am leaving forever. No one shall know whither I go. Beautiful, pure soul, thy life may not be linked with a stain. I stay for nothing, for to be near thee is torture, even unto death. I may not call thee my beautiful, mine, although it is still in my heart to say it; but do for me one thing that I ask of thee. Mr. Clark will tell thee what it is. Do it, that I may know how great was thy love. All the happiness I built for thee, I cannot have it shattered. This that I ask of thee is all the pleasure left me. Do what he asks of thee. I fear for thee, dearest, when thou art lonely; when thy heart is sad for me, remember that I live only in my love for thee, — but never seek to find me. This burden I must bear alone, and thou, dear heart, must be free. No power on earth — Oh, Portia! my life, my beautiful, I sinned when I wrung those words from thee. Forgive me, and take them back. Oh, God! that I should love thee thus, and turn my face away from thee forever!"

He folded and addressed the letter and sealed it, and went out in the dusk and mailed it, fearing his own weakness if he kept it in his possession.

Later he strolled out in the darkness. He would go to her and say farewell, telling her nothing but that he must go immediately to New York.

As he neared the house he heard her singing snatches of the song he heard her singing first. He still had her music, but she sang bits from memory. She was alone, and hoping he might come. He sat on the edge of the fountain, as before, so long ago it seemed to him now. Presently the singing ceased, and she came to the door, looking out into the darkness, as if he had called her.

"I am here, Portia." She came out to him. "I am listening to you as I listened to you so long ago, love. I was too sad to come in, for I am only here to say good-bye to you. I must go to New York immediately."

"To New York, John?"

"Yes, at midnight. It is important."

"What a pity! when we are to go together in so short a time." What a sweet ring in her voice! He could not trust himself to go with her into the lighted room.

"Come, bring a wrap and walk with me here in the starlight."

She brought the same little white shawl he had folded her in so often, and once again he placed it about her, and once again her pulses quickened at his touch. She felt that he was sad; it was but natural. Ah, little she thought she was walking beside a tortured soul, — that every bright and hopeful thing she said cut him to the heart. She tried to divert him from his grief by telling him

all the pretty little details of the preparations she was making for his wedding, and what Marguerite was doing and saying.

"Marguerite is so buoyant. She grieves; but now, since she has given herself up to her lover, she is simply irresistible. It will be the marvel of my life that you could have been such a foolish John. I can see no reason for it except that I might be made happy."

"You must always love her, for my sake. No matter what comes to me, love her. Will you? The time may come when she will be a great comfort to you."

"How could I help it, John?" Then she told him of her wedding dress. "It is done, but you are not to see it until I wear it, Mr. John."

He could bear it no longer. He had meant to say only a hurried good-bye, and he had lingered too long. He felt he had no right to touch her. She was never to be his.

"I must take you back to the house now, for I must go." Presently they stood beside the fountain. "When are you going to shut it off?" he asked, trying to still the tumult within by saying commonplaces.

"I must have it done to-morrow, before a freeze comes."

He took a jewel from his breast which he had purchased for his marriage gift to her. "Take this from me now, Portia. Will you always wear it for me? If — if — anything should happen to me, my beautiful — let me pin it on you."

"Nothing must happen to you, John; nothing

must — if anything should — and you should never come back to me — John, I would die."

He caught his breath, and his hands trembled so that he could not fasten the pin, and she did it for him. Then he kissed her, and turned away without another word. She stood with her hands still on the pin. After a moment she heard his steps returning, and went to meet him.

"What is it, John?"

"I — I forgot to leave a farewell message for your mother and grandfather and for — Marguerite. I have not told her I was going."

Then the strong hold he had set upon himself gave way, and for an instant she felt as if a whirlwind had seized her. She felt the kisses rained upon her face, hot and fast, upon her lips, her eyes, her cheeks. She felt herself helpless in his grasp, stunned by his vehemence; for in his heart he was saying with every kiss, "It is the last, the last forever." He took the white shawl from her shoulders. "Give this to me. I have wrapped you in it so often, let me keep it." And when he was gone she felt that he was weeping, and the tears leaped to her own eyes. Something was wrong with him, that he could not tell. What was this sudden going away? With heavy foreboding she turned into the house to weary herself all night long with fruitless questionings.

Next morning a small package and two letters came to Portia as her share of the mail. She took them to her room. One of the letters was John's. She recognized the hand, and kissed it, but laid it one side to read more at leisure, and opened the

package and the other letter. They were from Mr. Russell. The dear old man had heard of her approaching marriage and had sent her the jewels he had hoped she might one day wear for him. As she was taking them from the box, her mother entered. She held them up to the light, — a necklace of diamonds, and a chain of rarest antique workmanship, and a beautiful jewelled watch. Her cheeks flushed.

"Oh, mother, how beautiful! — but — but — should I accept them? What would John say? Here is Mr. Russell's letter. What a pretty letter it is! Read it, and look at these while I read John's."

She tore off the envelope and threw herself in a chair, and as she read the color left her cheeks, then her lips; but she read it through to the very end. When Mrs. Van Ostade looked up from the letter she was reading, she was frightened at the expression on her daughter's face. Portia sat rigid, as if seized with a catalepsy, — the letter sheets in her lap, her hands folded upon them.

"Portia, what is it?" Her mother came to her side, but she did not move. "Portia, speak!" She did not answer. Her mother began chafing her hands, for they were stiff and cold, and called for help. Marguerite came with eyes red from crying. Hanford had been telling her the truth. She knew what had come upon Portia, — that a sword had pierced her through. They laid her upon a couch, and for hours labored to arouse her, to bring the tears to her eyes.

"Portia, look at me, dear. Cry a little. Cry as

I do, dear," said Marguerite, piteously, kneeling at her side. "Oh! if she only could!"

Finally they sent for Miss Katherine. Another face, another voice, might help.

"Ma, they are in trouble. Perhaps you would better go too," said Miss Katherine. "You can speak to her as we can't." So the blind woman went and sat by Portia's side, and placed her hand on her head, and after a while the blessed tears came, and they all withdrew, and left them alone together.

"Oh, Hanford, is there nothing we can do?" said Marguerite.

"No, darling, we cannot change what is nor what has been."

"What has John done?"

"He has divided all he has, and left half in my hands for Portia's use."

"The noble fellow!"

"And he has left her, to go — no one knows where."

Marguerite broke forth in a fresh outburst of grief.

"And he has left instructions that if your aunt has left anything to him in her will, as she undoubtedly has, it is to be given to Chesterfield."

"Of course, that is right," she sobbed. "Where has he gone, Hanford?"

"No one knows, darling, but he will write to me. I made him promise me that, and he did it on condition that I would not reveal his whereabouts."

"Hanford, I wish they could have married before he found it out."

Hanford groaned. "Would to God that poor humanity were not so frail, — that they could look at the spirit through the temple it inhabits, — what is wealth or caste or color compared with the worth of a soul? Good God! How long, how long!" He bowed his head in his hands.

Marguerite knelt at her lover's side and looked into his eyes. "Hanford, if she loves him as I love you, I know what she will do."

"Do you, darling?" he said, drawing her to him.

"Yes, and I am going to tell her so too."

"No, no. Marguerite, such questions as these the heart must wrestle with alone. We can only wait." They sat in silence for a time, then Hanford spoke again, for she was sobbing on his shoulder. "For us, we will be married, Marguerite, and then we will watch over her and love her for John's sake. Shall we?"

"Yes, Hanford."

The next morning Portia stood in her mother's room, "clothed and in her right mind." Her grandfather sat in his chair, bowed down with sorrow for her.

"Grandfather," she said, "don't be so sad. I will be brave." Then kneeling at her mother's feet she laid her head in her lap as of old. "Oh, mother, dear mother, what shall I do?"

Her mother laid her hand on her head. "No one can help you, Portia, only God."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE JUDGMENT OF PORTIA

AS the days passed slowly away, Portia went about her accustomed duties, not complainingly nor silently, yet a pallor had crept into her face and her joyous buoyancy was gone. A note had come into her voice strange to them all.

"If it were I, I should cry my eyes out; but then just her voice makes me sad. It sounds like tears held back. I only wish she would cry or do some desperate thing. I should."

"Marguerite," said Portia, one day, "I wish you and Hanford would be married without waiting any longer. I want to see you happy before any terrible thing comes between you."

"Don't think of it, Portia. Why should anything come between us?"

"Ah! but don't you see? We felt safe too, a short time ago, — so safe Perhaps I am only nervous." When Marguerite told Hanford of Portia's request, he said, "Let us be married now, as she says. The sadness of her looking forward to it will be passed then. We will go away for a few weeks and not be always before her."

So they were quietly married, and the light of Marguerite's joyous presence was gone from the house for a time, and Portia sat alone in her room with her head in her hands, thinking, thinking.

It seemed to her she should die of the horror of great darkness that she felt settling down upon her.

"There are millions and millions of other peoples in the world more than there are of us," she cried in her heart. "Are we the only ones God loves? Then why did he make them? Why are they allowed to live and multiply? Do they have souls like us? Then why do we hate them and loathe them? Did Christ feel as we do? Why didst thou do this thing, Lord? What have I done, Father, that thou hast done this thing? What has he done? Thou didst create him, thou didst give him to me. Why must we suffer — wherein have we sinned?"

"Portia," said her mother one day, "you are in the house too much, dear. You will be ill."

"Yes, mother, I am going out this morning, to ride." And she did; she rode over in the direction of Mammy Clarissa's cabin, being, as it were, drawn irresistibly thither. It was the first time she had used the little brown horse since John went away. She tied the creature to the small sapling near the door, and petted its brown neck and laid her cheek against its velvety nose.

"Oh, Brownie, I love you!" she said pitifully, and went into the cabin.

Old Clarissa was lying upon the best bed at last, alone, fading away. A smouldering fire still glowed in the black fireplace, and the little window shutter was open. The light from the window streamed across her face, and over her wrinkled hands lying folded on the patchwork counterpane. All was swept and tidied, for Gabriella had been in and

set things straight before she had left for a day's washing in the village.

The old woman seemed to have been sleeping, for she turned her head and looked at Portia in a dazed way as she stood there.

"Why, honey," she said feebly, at last, "I nuvva did n' know yo' stan'in' dar." She tried to rise, but lay back again. "I kyan' git up fo' wait on yo' no mo'. Jes' yo' take a cheer, honey."

"Yes, mammy, yes. I can wait on myself."

"I ain' seed yo' fo' a mighty long time." Clarissa closed her eyes and lay quite still, as if she had wandered off again.

Portia sat down in the old woman's chair, for her knees trembled and it seemed as if she should fall. Then she rose and stood by the bedside, looking down on the wasted figure and frail, pinched face before her. A strange feeling of desperate misery possessed her for a moment, as if she could crush out the poor frail life of the unwitting cause of it. Then the pathetic truth crept into her heart with its softening power, and she was overwhelmed with the sadness of it all. Old Clarissa lay so still Portia felt the awe stealing over her that one feels in the presence of death, until a gentle, sighing breath denoted that it was not death, but only the quiet sleep of weakness.

Through the wrinkles and pallor she noted the fine lines of the old face. What must this woman once have been? What was her inheritance? A slave, but beautiful, strong, lithe, — there was grace still in her hands as they lay clasping something between the thin fingers. An assortment of

articles was laid out on the counterpane within reach of them. Evidently her cherished keepsakes had been placed there for her amusement during Gabriella's absence, — a bright-colored pasteboard box, and a silver thimble, a little mother-of-pearl cross, and a ring of gold, with two hearts engraved on it, a pair of ear-rings, with pendant hoops, and a string of blue porcelain beads. Wrapped around a little pebble, with a hole in it, were a bit of lace and a faded brocade ribbon.

While Portia still stood wondering what might be the mystery of her life, and what she held so closely, — why she had been allowed to cross her path and come between her and the sunlight of her hopes, the old slave looked up as if she saw her now for the first time.

"Why, honey, is yo' dar? Take a cheer, chile." Again she tried to rise, but sank back as before. "I declar' I 's pow'ful weak, honey; I kyan' git up fo' wait on yo'."

"There, mammy, never mind," said Portia, gently. "Tell me what you are doing with these things. How long have you been ill? You ought to have sent me word about it."

"Laws, honey, I ain' sick; I jes' gwine home at las', I reckon. I done be'n wait'n' heah fo' young Mars'r John tu come in. 'Pears like he a mighty long time comin'." The old eyes closed wearily, and Portia, dreading to have her lose consciousness again, spoke quickly.

"Mr. Marshall has gone away, mammy; I don't know where he is." Portia felt as if she were choking, and put her hand to her throat. "Oh,

Clarissa," she cried at last, "I don't know where he is, — you can tell me. You are going to the God who made you, — who made him, — and all of us — there you can see him wherever he is, — can't you almost see him now? Where is he?" She knelt by the bed and covered her face with her hands, — shame, despair, grief, overwhelming her.

Thoroughly roused by Portia's vehemence, the old woman raised herself on one elbow, and gazed at the bright young head bowed in passionate grief, in astonishment.

Then she laid her hand tenderly on Portia's hair, and her old eyes shone with a strange gleam, and her wan face grew radiant as a faint glimmering of the truth crept into her soul.

"Why, honey, chile, 'pears like yo' grievin' fo' young Mars'r John tu." She felt over the bed covers for that which she held in her hands when Portia came in. It was a small oval miniature exquisitely painted on ivory and surrounded by a gold frame of the finest workmanship. "Heah 't is, honey. I 'lowed I 'd done los' hit — my h'a't took sech a jump — hit nerved me so, — I 's pow'ful weak, honey."

Portia rose and took the picture with trembling hands. "What is it, mammy?"

"Das' Mars'r Gen'l Ma'shall he's ownse'f, chile, — young Mars'r John's fadah, honey; de ve'y sp'it 'n' image o' he's fadah, de way he done look dat time he come 'long an' pay de money fo' me, an' tuk me off'n de block 'long home wid 'im dat time. Yo' look at hit, chile; yo' eyes young an' sha'p, I reckon. I ain' seed hit fo' mighty long

while back, my eyes be'n so pore; but hit de ve'y p'it 'n' image o' Gen'l Mars'r John, hit are." Portia took it over to the open shutter, the one small square of light in the dusky room, and scanned the delicate lines of the painting eagerly. There it was, undisguised by the old-fashioned costume and cut of hair, — there was the likeness to her lover. Different, yet strangely like. More dreaminess about the eyes, less alert and sharply cut than the face of the present; but still there was a strength of character and dignity in all the lineaments, showing a noble ancestry.

"Where did you get this, mammy?" she said huskily.

"I jes' tuk hit, honey. Ol' miz lef' mighty suddent aftah dat time Mars'r Gen'l done brung home f'om de wah, she did. She ain' mo' 'n git back f'om de grabe, w'en she begin pack up, an' we-all war 'bleeged tu help. I done heahed her tell Miz Wells she 'low'd we-all wuz gwine be sot free nex' t'ing come, an' she gwine tek all but de good-fo'-nuttin' ones 'long daown Cuba way tu her faddah's plantation. She 'lowed we 'd be wuth mo' there 'n we be wuth heah." Poor Clarissa paused from weakness, but Portia could not let her rest.

"Go on, mammy, go on. Tell me more; tell me about this," she said, still gazing at the picture, fascinated by the dreamy likeness to the one she loved.

"'Bouts dat, honey? Ol' miz lef' dat on her table in her own room. Dat de onliest t'ing she lef' in de whole haouse, 'cept'n' me. I done lock myse'f in de closet dat time de ova'seer chain up

de niggahs fo' tek 'em 'long. She nuvva try de do'. I lay dar two days 'daout nuffin' tu eat, an' I nuvva breave ha'dly, lest she hyah me, an' tek me long. Josephus, he wan' no 'count dem days 'daout me, an' Chas he done run 'way, so she nuvva tuk dem neider. She nuvva cotch we-uns, naw 'm. I heahed 'em holla an' call, an' I lay still. I heah'd her say, 'Leab go callin'. She mount a fotch a heap, but dar, she done sp'ile long 'go. Anyhow, we kyan' sell niggers no mo', I reckon. Let her stay an' starve.' Ol' miz she keer mo' fo' de dollah dan she keer fo' Gen'l Mars'r John or her own soul, I reckon so. Honey, I 's pow'ful dry."

The water in the cabin was warm and stale, and Portia took a cup and hurried down the winding path to the spring bubbling out of a rock and brought some that was fresh and cool. Out in the sunshine her courage came back to her. She ceased to tremble, and as she bent over the old woman and held the water to her lips her heart grew tender toward her, and a peace came to her which she had not felt before, which she had thought was forever gone from her.

"Drink, mammy. This is cool and nice. Now try to think. Tell me all you want me to do. Why did you give me this?"

"I wan' yo' tu give dat tu young Mars'r John, honey. I done kep' hit fo' him, an' heah I lyin' wait'n' fo' him come git hit, an' see he's ol' mammy once mo'. I done tol' de troof, an' 'fess 'fo' de Lawd, an' now I gwine be 'lowed tu pass, I reckon. I kyan' wait fo' him no longer. Honey, tell 'im dat ar' de ve'y sp'it 'n' image o' he's

fadah; like he done look w'en he young like he are."

"But I don't know where he is, mammy."

"Yo' kin fin' 'im, chile, yo' young an' spry. I ain' seed nobody pearter. Look a-heah, honey, likely he done gone tu he's paw's twin brudder in San F'ncisco, wha' done brung 'im up all dese yeahs."

Portia's heart leaped within her. Why had she not thought of that? In the same instant she perceived the truth, that no heart clings so close to another as a mother's to her son, be she of whatever race or color.

"Honey, I lub dat boy lak I kyan' tell yo' how I lub dat boy, — mo' 'n I lub my own soul, I reckon. Yo' tell 'im dat, honey."

"Yes, mammy, yes. Now you rest." Portia smoothed the pillow and straightened the bed clothing, and then after a little search found some milk, which she warmed over the embers and gave the old woman to drink.

"Yo' 's pow'ful good tu ol' mammy, chile."

"I am doing this for your boy too, Cl'issy."

"Yo' 's pow'ful good, honey."

Portia left her quietly sleeping, but old Clarissa never woke again in this world.

All the next day Portia spent in her room alone, and the next morning she appeared at the breakfast table composed and cheerful. Hanford and Marguerite had returned and were to spend some time longer there, when Hanford would go to New York and resume his business. Portia seemed to them to have regained, in large measure, her old

manner and cheeriness. After the meal was over they all stayed chatting together pleasantly; and Portia, slipping her arm about her mother, said caressingly, —

"Mamma deary, can you and grandfather get along without me for a while? I want to go away somewhere. I hardly know where nor for how long, but I just want to go. I will write to you and telegraph you every day if you wish, so don't think I am going to run away entirely," she said, noting a look of alarm in her mother's face and laughing a little. Then she turned to Hanford: "You will look after grandpapa and little mother for me, will you not, Mr. Clark? — you and Marguerite."

Marguerite sprang up and threw her arms about Portia's neck. "Oh, you darling, you darling! I knew you would do it. Yes, we will. Of course we will, won't we, Hanford?"

Portia kissed her. "How do you know what I am going to do, dear? I hardly know myself yet. But I will write and tell you all I do, surely."

"Whatever you do will be right, Portia," said her grandfather. "I am always sure of you."

"But, daughter," said her mother, anxiously, "you won't, — you will let us know very soon where you are, will you not?"

"Mother dear, don't worry about me, don't. I have travelled alone before, and you never thought of being troubled. I have put on your desk a plan of the places I may go to, and if I change my course, as I may, I will telegraph you immediately, so you never need be in doubt about me. Really,

I am quite sane, and happier than I have been for weeks. This time trust me, as grandfather does."

"Yes, dear, you know I do."

"And mamma, I — have arranged — affairs; you will find enough for everything while I am away. It 's all right. I am sure this is best."

Mr. Ridgeway rose hurriedly and walked over to the window. The time was when he could have saved her all thought of that. He gazed over the landscape for a moment and drummed on the sill nervously, then he walked back to her chair, and bending down kissed her on the cheek. "We can spare you for a little while, but not long," he said.

She took his face between her two hands. "You treasure of a grandfather," she said. "Mamma, my trunk is packed; I did it yesterday. And, grandfather, will you call Alexander to bring the carriage? I will run out and see Maggie a moment and then be ready. The train leaves at ten, does it not, Mr. Clark?"

She seemed quite like herself again as she left the room with the old spring in her step; and as she bade them a cheery good-bye, they all felt that to have arrived at a plan of action was for her at least salutary.

Hanford accompanied her to the station; but she said little of her plans except: "I have decided to use some of the money John wished me to have." It was the first time she had spoken his name aloud to any one except in old Clarissa's cabin, and her face became crimson, and she turned her head away that he might not see.

"Yes," he said at last, "that is right; it is as he

would have wished." He spoke as he felt, as if his friend had departed from this life, and Portia laughed out a nervous, reckless little laugh; but it served to lighten the tension under which they felt themselves.

"No, no. John is not dead," she said. "I shall find him. I could not use it for anything else, you know that, and I am going to ask you —"

"He has not written me yet; I could not tell you where he is, even if I were not —"

"I was not going to ask that. I would not even if he had written. No. But I will find him if it takes every cent; if I have to work my way through the world to do it. I was going to speak about mother and grandfather. I —"

"I will be a son to them; do not fear," he said tenderly.

"I believe you." She gave him her hand as he helped her from the carriage. "You are a true friend to John and a good brother to me. I accept your kindness, but you can never know how much it is to me. Good-bye. I trust them to you for a time. Believe me, I have thought well over what I am doing. Good-bye."

They were a little late, and she stepped on to the train without going into the station. He turned instinctively to look whether her trunk had been left behind, but no. She had attended to that and her ticket the evening before. He smiled as he gazed at the retreating train.

"She 's all right," he said to himself. "Whatever comes, her head is level. I wonder if she knows, herself, just where she is going."

Hardly did she know. She was feeling her way rather. It seemed to her as the train rushed through the tunnels and deep cuts among the hills, and over gorges and precipices, winding in and out among the very mountain peaks, that she was being borne by some mighty power, at its own volition, whether she would or no; like a maiden in a fairy tale, taken from her home in sleep by some awful genie and carried swiftly on through space, to reach at last an enchanted castle and be awakened by a lover's kiss.

She leaned back on the cushions and closed her eyes. "Let me think," she said. But she did not think, she was only dreaming; looking into her lover's eyes, beautiful now with the light of self-renunciation, — touching his hand, — feeling him near her, — think? why should she think? she had done her thinking the day before; now she might dream and drift, moving on to the fulfilment of that which she had already calmly determined upon. Natures like Portia's can afford to sometimes dream and live in an ecstasy of the imagination. They have earned the right to this highest indulgence of the spirit by the practical energy of their lives, the care and faithfulness with which they have met and overcome difficulties, and battled with the commonplace.

Although she had many acquaintances in the city, she determined to go directly to the hotel where John usually stopped when not with friends and learn if he had been there. She knew he would not be with friends of the past, — indeed, might not have been in the city at all, — there

were many other places where he might have been staying, but he had said New York when he left, so she went there first. "I have nothing but my woman's intuition to guide me so I will be guided by that," she said, — not a bad thing to trust to upon occasion, as Portia found.

All the deadened numbness of spirit under which she had labored for the last weeks had left her, and she arrived braced for any emergency. Had John Marshall been in New York? She would know if she had to look over every hotel register in the city.

She went where they were to have gone on their wedding journey, and there she was spared this disagreeable detective duty. He had been there and had left only three days before. She secured a room and locked herself up to think. Yes, he had been here during the whole of the last week, alone, where they were to have been together. While she was kneeling at the bedside of old Clarissa he had been here thinking of her. Now what should she do? Inaction was terrible. She must go. She must follow, even to the ends of the earth. She paced restlessly up and down the room.

"Where has he been all this time? But there, it will do no good to know that. He has been here and he has gone." She wrung her hands. "Which way shall I turn now?"

Suddenly she threw herself on her knees and covered her face with her hands. The splendid poise of her nature seemed to be leaving her. She felt so alone, her human limitations so narrow,

the veil of the future seemed drawn so closely about her and to be so impenetrable and dark, she became, as it were, caught up out of herself and lifted toward her Creator.

Souls who have loved intensely, they alone can feel this irresistible drawing power, and through it the touch of the Divine. Love opens the floodgates of heaven and unlocks the heart for the light to stream in. Love leads the soul to God by the straightest, swiftest way. That which we call woman's intuition is usually only her quick response to Love's leading.

When Portia rose from her knees, her face was radiant with a new beauty. She began to do little commonplace things, — shaking out her dresses and arranging a few small articles on her dressing-case and mantle, singing softly as she moved about. "I shall be leaving to-morrow, but it will be just as well to do this," she said. Lying just under the edge of the wardrobe, she spied a small red leather notebook. It had a familiar look, and she picked it up quickly, brushing the dust from the smooth, pocket-worn cover. It was what any man might have dropped and lost sight of. She turned the leaves and glanced at the few memoranda it contained. They were in John's hand, and, yes, here was the page on which she had jotted down for him once a few measures of a song she wished him to get for her. She could not remember the name, only a few bars, she had heard sung; and here, under her careless little notes, he had written two words, "Bless her." She sank down in a low rocker, clasping the little book

tightly in her hands. Here, in this very room! Only three days ago! Surely she should find him. Where should she go first?

He would be sure, sooner or later, to go to those who had stood in the place of his parents for so many years. At least he would write to them. Should she wait and write? No, there was nothing to do but to take the long journey. She must see them and know them. Strangers though they were to her, she must turn to them for help.

Portia spent the days and nights of her trip across the continent in continual pondering over the great problem of life and its complications. Her heart ached for humanity, deeply stirred through her love for her lover. All along the miles upon miles of prairie land, lacking now the beauty of the waving sea of green of the spring-time, and on, across the barren alkali plains, where the bones of dead cattle lay bleaching, or the wreck of an emigrant wagon flapped in the never-ceasing breeze its tattered covering, waving its rags, like thin brown hands, with long attenuated fingers, mutely wrung in woful lament over those who had gone on in hunger and pain, leaving the wreck behind them, still to follow the treacherous *ignis fatuus* of gold to their doom, Portia, rapt in her own thoughts, sat silent, unheeding those around her. She gazed out of the window, at the flying, shifting monotony of the scene, until her heart as well as her eyes ached. At the eating stations she looked into the faces of the rough miners, or was importuned by a copper-colored squaw to look at her pappoose and give her a silver

piece for the privilege. She noted the half-breeds lounging about the stations, and the deft Chinese, laboring and chattering together in their musical sing-song, and more heavily and more insistently the great problem of life forced itself on her.

Why were all these created? For what end all this struggle, this searching for gold, this squalor and degradation? These women, whose great hungry eyes, like the eyes of animals, looked into hers eagerly, for a smile for the babies at their backs; these stolid men, whose only motive in life seemed to be merely to exist, — for what end?

A little girl timidly offered her a bit of pottery. She bought it and carried it back with her into the train, and here, in this piece of rudely shaped, and decorated, and unevenly burnt clay she found the answer to all her questionings. This little Indian child was her teacher, for she saw in the little jar she had bought, the shaping, creating hand, the imagining mind. And in the embryotic chaos of ideas displayed in the strange, symbolic design and coloring of the decoration she saw the aspiration of a soul, — a reaching, striving, yes, even an attaining soul.

"And these are our brothers and sisters," she thought. "The great Caucasian race must stoop to these before it can rise higher. They have reached the boundary line past which they cannot move toward God-likeness until they have learned to place God's estimate of value on a human soul, of whatever race or condition. The value of a human soul — God's estimate — then these must be lifted up before we can rise out of the grovelling, man-

made standards we have set up for ourselves. Can a small part of humanity be culled out from the whole to be raised up to God's image, and the rest lie where they are and die?"

She looked toward the setting sun, where a distant peak of the Rockies stood out like burnished gold against a molten sky, and above it the rays of light streamed upward like a flaming cross, lifted and held over the earth by a mighty, unseen hand.

"And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." The words repeated themselves in her heart. "All men — all men — not we alone, because we are white, — all men. These must be lifted up, — all these." As the train rushed on, the monotonous rhythm of its motion seemed to beat out these words in continual chant. "All men — all men — not we alone."

From her bosom she drew the ivory miniature, and again she studied it. The face of her lover masquerading in old-time costume looked out at her as from a tiny window. The charm of strong, beautiful young manhood was in that face, — a pride and a fineness born of generations of patrician ancestry; and this one, this beautiful one, had stooped from his high, God-given position to the slave; and so, after all these years, the eyes that looked out of the tiny window into hers were those, not of the father, but of the son, the child of the slave, — her lover's eyes. The tears came, one by one, and she furtively wiped them away, and wrapping the picture in a little lace-trimmed handkerchief she placed it back in the bosom of

her dress, and the train rushed on over the long, monotonous desert, rumbling the same chant. Should she find him at last at the end of her journey, the one she loved?

The last day was the longest day of all the five. How slowly the train seemed to drag its weary length along! Her heart beat high, and her cheeks were flushed. She scarcely noticed the beauty of the scenes through which she passed. As the landscape flashed by, she thought vaguely of the evanescence of all things.

"Everything will pass, all will go by like this, and there will be nothing left of us but our spirits. We shall have only what we are. The standards of the world are not just; they are hard and cruel. I am glad they are to pass away. I am glad we are to be judged by the merciful justice of God at the last, and not by each other." As she leaned wearily back and closed her eyes, it seemed to her as if she were really passing out of one world into another, and then suddenly there was the stir and bustle about her of the arrival, and she was at the end of her journey.

She rose and passed out with the crowd. No one to meet her, none in the city, unless John were there, whom she even knew; but somewhere in the great busy place were two whom he loved. She rested only an hour in the hotel, and then set out on the search. In one of the finest of the older residences, on one of the hills of that city of hills, she found them. Roses and fuchsias climbed up the side of the old house, and round the piazza and windows, and geraniums covered the foundation

stones. The windows were wide open, and the lace curtains were blowing out in the breeze.

A Chinese servant admitted her, and ambled off in his slippered feet to find his mistress. The parlor in which she waited was large, and amply furnished with plain, unostentatious elegance. The mistress of this home sat in her little back sitting-room, gently swaying to and fro in a low rocker, darning one of her husband's socks, and chatting with him, as he sat opposite her, trying to read his paper, and looking at her over the top of his glasses. She was a trim little body, and not so little neither, only she had the dainty neatness of figure and dress that usually distinguishes small women.

In the mornings, when shopping, or about her homely household tasks, she always wore brown serge, but in the afternoons she invariably wore black satin, with blond net smoothly folded about her throat, and down the open bosom of the dress, and pinned with an old-fashioned, large cameo brooch.

So she appeared now, a very pleasant sight in the eyes of her husband, when the meek Celestial handed her Portia's card and slipped noiselessly away.

She rose suddenly, scattering scissors and balls on the floor. "Darius Wentworth Marshall!" she cried.

"Well, Mary?" he reached from his chair, and gathered up the articles she had dropped with the unconscious patience born of years of such willing service.

"Look at that card! I told you if she was worth him she would follow him. I told him so too. I would."

"Certainly you would, Mary," he said, with a quiet smile; "that goes without saying."

She began brushing the threads from her dress. "Now, Darius, what shall I say? We will keep her right here, of course; but what shall I say?"

"Wait till you see her, Mary. You will say the right thing then. You know you will."

She patted his cheek, kissed him, and left him. This childless woman had petted her husband for forty years. It had become a habit with her now.

Some women, whether they be young or old, whether they be conscious of it or not, more often not, have the power of drawing other souls to themselves, to love them and to need them. There is no magnet so strong or so blessed as the sympathizing, loving heart of a sweet, good woman.

Portia, wearied with her long journey, felt her knees tremble under her as she rose to meet John's Aunt Mary, but the moment she looked into those kindly gray eyes she knew why it was he had always so loved her. For an instant the lips of each quivered with unspoken thoughts. They held out their hands to each other, and in another moment were locked in each other's arms.

Then Portia spoke between her sobs. "I had to come to you, John loved you so. There was nothing left for me to do."

"You have done just right. I have been expecting you for the last three days. John said you

would not come; I said I knew you would. Now come right up to your room."

"How could you expect me? It was such a wild thing for me to do. I did not know, myself, when I left home, that I was coming. I did not even know that he was here. I just came, that is all."

"How did I know you were coming? Why, child, I have been a woman all my life. That is how I knew. Here is your room, the one he used to have. I wanted him to take it again, but he would not. He said it brought back too many memories. Poor fellow! he is just about out of his head, that 's what he is."

"What a dear room!" said Portia, entering it. "How could he help having it again?"

"Why, the boy is crazy; he does n't — but there, dear, he will be all right now."

Portia, still quivering with excitement, bent over a great vase of roses on the table. "How sweet these are!" she said, trying to calm herself.

"John set out the bush those grew on the last year he was here. I always keep a vase of them in this room. Where is your trunk?" Portia told her. "Very well. It shall be sent for immediately." The dear old lady bustled about a moment, then took a chair near Portia's. "Now, dear, tell me everything you wish, and ask all the questions you wish."

"You are so good. When did John come?"

"Three days ago."

"And do you know what he is going to do?"

"That he will tell you now, dear. He was going to Japan. He was to start to-morrow."

Portia turned pale. "Oh, what if I had waited another day!"

"Now, child, you are too tired to talk or think. You did n't wait another day, so it is all right." She left the room, returning immediately with a long white wrapper of soft quilted silk over her arm. "You just put this on and lie down for an hour, and by that time your trunk will be here, and then you can put on a fresh dress and see John for yourself. He will be back by that time. This is mine, but I guess we are about of a bigness, are n't we?"

"Oh!" said Portia, smiling, "some day I will tell you how good you are. I can't now, but I will do whatever you tell me to."

Sweetly and dreamlessly she rested in the rose-scented room, and awoke refreshed and strengthened. She came downstairs dressed in the colors John loved best to see her wear, — a creamy white gown, with violet bands of velvet, and knots of ribbon, and at her belt a cluster of John's roses. The pretty pink flush had come back to her cheeks, and Aunt Mary's eyes were satisfied with the sight of her. She took her in her arms once more, then turned her about to see her on all sides.

"There! Now you are just what a woman ought to be. I don't wonder John fell in love with you. Now, dear, I am going to leave you here alone. You take a book and read a while. John has come back, and gone up to his room. He will be down soon; he is so restless he never stays anywhere more than a minute except at night, and then he walks the floor most of the time. No, I have n't

told him you are here, — not a thing; and when he comes in, dear, don't you mind a thing he says. He has got to the point where he does n't know what 's good for him, nor care."

Portia was glad he had not been told of her presence. She did not wish him to have time to prepare himself to meet her, nor in his self-renunciation to try to dissuade her from her purpose by appearing to feel other than he really felt. She wished to surprise him into such betrayal of himself that his whole heart would be revealed, that he might not say her nay.

She walked the room restlessly a moment, then went to the window and looked out. A Chinaman, trudging under a pair of heavy baskets, passed by. Everywhere they seemed to be in evidence. She did not realize that she was effectually screened from the room by the silken curtains, and at the moment John entered. Her heart stood still. She shrank back into the corner, dreading to move, and drew the curtains closer about her. He walked slowly about, looking absently at this and that, his hands behind his back, his head drooped. All the vigorous activity of mind and body seemed to have left him. His eyes looked sad and larger than usual. Only his hair clung a little to his temples, pressed down by his hat, as it used when he came hurriedly from a walk over the hills. Presently he dropped down into his aunt's little rocker, and sat with his elbows on his knees, and his head in his hands. Slowly, involuntarily, Portia came toward him, holding out her hands, and John lifted his head. Then, in that instant, she saw all she

wanted to see, all her heart craved. He rose, with his old joyous smile, glowing, transfigured, and then, without moving a step toward her, sank back into his chair, shaken, quivering, and covered his face.

She went near to him, and placed one hand on his hair, lightly touching the soft rings. He put out his hand to thrust her gently from him, but instead his fingers closed over hers and held them close.

"Go away from me, Portia, go away," he groaned, yet clinging to her hand as a drowning man clings to a straw.

She knelt beside him, and laid her cheek against his; it was wet with tears. She took her own handkerchief and wiped them away, while his arm stole about her and drew her to him.

"Portia, Portia, I would have saved you, dear; I would have saved you. Why did you come, my beautiful?" Then he looked at her. Hungrily, tenderly, his eyes looked into hers, while the strong arm that held her quivered. "I can't sacrifice you, Portia; I can't do it. I love you too well. You have come to me like an angel. You have brought me happiness enough for a lifetime; you have brought me happiness enough for heaven. Now go, dear; let this be the last. Let me go away from you now and bear the sins of my fathers alone."

Up to this time Portia had not spoken, — she could not. Now the words came like a flood. "Why did I follow you, John? Because I must! I would have followed you to the ends of the earth.

If you had gone where you were going to-morrow, I would have followed you there. I did not know you were here, John, I only followed my heart; that was how I found you. What kind of a woman did you take me for? Did you think I would stay there, at home, and take the money you left me, while you wandered off into the world alone with this hurt in your soul?"

She put her hand into her bosom and drew out the little miniature of his father, which she had carried so carefully. "Before I left, John, I went to see your mother; she is dead now. I thought she was dying when I went into the cabin, but she said she was only waiting for you to come in. She begged me to tell her where you were, and I could n't. Then she gave me this for you; look at it. It is your father."

He took it from her and threw it on the floor, and would have set his heel on it, but she snatched it up.

"I tell you, Portia, I am cursed. My father cursed me," he said vehemently. "Give it to me." He groaned and turned his face away, but still held her to him.

"Other fathers have sinned; yours is not the only one. Every human being must bear in some way the sins of his fathers. All are not cursed. You must not forget the last part of that commandment, 'Showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.' Why, John, I love this little picture. It looks like you, John, — as if you were wearing those old-fashioned clothes, and looking out at me. Look at it. Think

of that beautiful young man, your father. If I had lived then and had known him as I do you now, I should have loved him, John. No, you cannot have it. I shall keep it here, as I have done, so carefully, until you can love it as I do."

"Oh, Portia, if I could only die now! You have brought me this moment of perfect happiness — but it cannot last, dearest, it must not. Do you remember that last night when I bade you good-bye?"

"Yes, John." She spoke so low he scarce could hear her. "How could I forget?" and her cheeks flamed crimson at the remembrance of that good-bye.

"I was crazed, then, darling, but I meant it for all time. It was to save you; it was best, — and now — "

Portia felt herself choking. She tried to speak, and struggled for her voice.

"Wait, wait, John; don't say it, — let me speak." Suddenly she threw her arms about his neck, and drew his head down to her. "Listen, listen to me. Once you conquered me, John. You made me love; you know it, John. You made me say words to you, — do you remember? — you said them to me, — 'No power on earth shall take you from me, John.' Now this, that is taking you from me, that you are allowing to take me from you, is an earthly power. Man, not God, made the distinctions that would separate us. God made you, and gave you your living soul, his forever. Must I give up the God-made man for the man-made distinctions that would discriminate between one of his living souls and another? John, to him all souls are white souls;

he made them all; he so loved the world, John, not only one race of it. We must do the same before we can cross the boundary line we have reached now toward God-likeness. One day we must go to him; we can take to him only what we are; all the rest will pass away and be as nothing. John, what I love in you is what God loves. Take me, John, and love me."

He was conquered. He rose, strong in his manhood's strength, and again his face shone like the face of one transfigured. He lifted Portia from her knees and held her to his breast. "Forever, darling, forever," he said.

"And, John, the past is to be put behind us for all time. You are to be as I, and I am to be as you."

"Forever, my beautiful. Where is the dress I never saw, — your wedding dress?"

"I have it with me. It is upstairs."

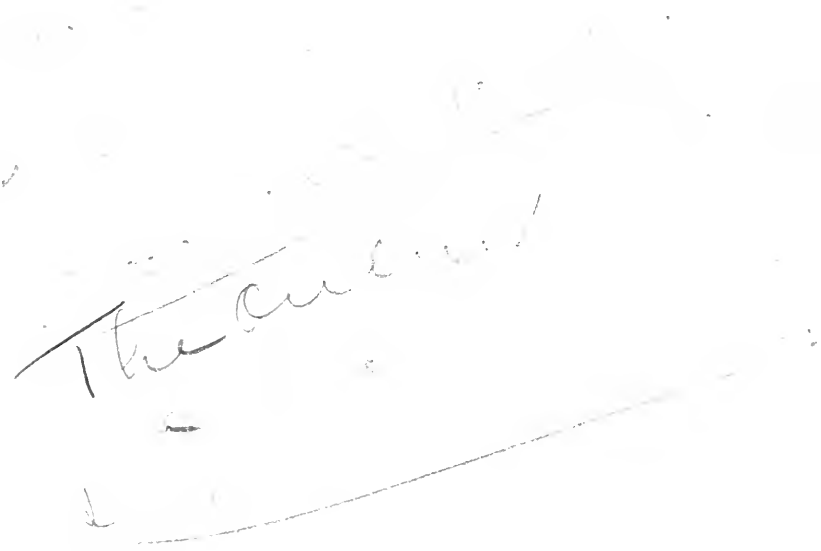
"Will you wear it for me to-morrow, Portia?" His eyes danced with the old light, but his lips quivered.

"Yes, John. Shall I go with you wherever you go?"

"Always, dearest, always. I could not let you leave me now; it would take my life."

"Shall we go back, John?"

"Not yet. We will arrange for your dear little mother; we will think about it, and then we will go where I intended to go alone, and become adjusted to the world. You see, sweet one, I have entered a new world now, and must learn to know it. You are to teach me."

When Aunt Mary entered the room, she was satisfied. "It is all right, dears; it is just as it should be. I saw how it was, John, the moment I looked at her. You could not help loving her any more than she could help loving you. I told you she would come, and she did. That 's just what I should have done. Now come out to tea."

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